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21

st plenary meeting

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Official Records

President: Mr. Thomson (Fiji)

*government*In the absence of the President,
Ms. Young (Belize), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3 05 p.m.

Agenda item 8 (continued)

General debate

The Acting President: I call on His Excellency Mr. Perfecto Rivas Yasay Jr., Secretary for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines.

Mr. Yasay (the Philippines): On behalf of the Philippine Government and the Filipino people, I wish to convey our warmest congratulations to Ambassador Peter Thomson on his election as President of the General Assembly at its seventy-first session. I also wish to commend him for choosing a theme that resonates very well among Member States and partners. The theme, "The Sustainable Development Goals: a universal push to transform our world", strongly reaffirms the *raison d'être* of the United Nations.

The Philippines is one of the founding Members of the Organization. For more than seven decades, our engagement and partnership with the United Nations has been a riveting story of our aspirations as a people, born of our colonial past and our independent present. With its central and strategic role, the United Nations remains a relevant and important platform where all nations can make that decisive push to empower us all to achieve and sustain our development agenda, which has the interests of our peoples at its core.

Today, the Philippines is once again privileged to renew its commitment to the cause of peace, security and sustainable development through key priority areas and advocacies identified in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The global action to transform our world illuminates the urgency and importance of our efforts in the Philippines to explore new horizons and break new ground, anchored in our unremitting commitment as a democracy to the rule of law and the well-being of our sovereign people and to our desire to remain a responsible partner in the international community.

The guiding principles and core values enshrined in the Constitution of the Philippines include the sanctity of human life, the inalienable rights of each person, the supremacy of the law, freedom, equality, peace, justice and the nation's right to self-determination. Among the country's mandates is the pursuit of an independent foreign policy designed to promote national interests. With our hard-fought and hard-won independence, we have valued and zealously guarded our rights and liberties. To prevent abuse and unwanted excesses, the checks and balances of our democratic institutions are actively at play. They range from the three highly independent branches of government — the Supreme Court, the Congress and the Executive Branch — to the open and free press and civil society groups committed to guaranteeing the freedom and prosperity of every Filipino.

Those fundamental and time-honoured principles and values give rise to the solemn duty of our people to choose their leaders. In turn, the Government has

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the obligation to fervently defend the people's rights and liberties. Reneging on that responsibility places the Government at risk of being removed by popular initiatives, including People Power — a glorious event in the Philippines that is admired and remembered around the world.

Five months ago, our people, through our nation's democratic principles and processes, elected a new leader. President Rodrigo Roa Duterte triumphed in the democratic elections with an unprecedented and resounding electoral mandate. The Filipino people, proud of their democratic values, traditions and heritage, have spoken. Their vote is an unmistakable call for a deepening of our democracy, where our people will truly be liberated from the shackles of fear, conflict, poverty and injustice. Their choice represents the expressed wish of the people to revitalize the entire country as a sovereign equal among the community of nations. Their sacred ballots cast an unequivocal and resounding voice for change and for tearing down antiquated political and economic structures that have continued to generate and perpetuate numerous inequalities. They voted for the renewal of our communities and our society, for a life of constancy, dignity and honour.

In his address to the nation, President Duterte declared that the rule of law and the respect for due process will prevail at all times. Clearly, we will be guided by established norms and procedures under the law to deliver on the strong mandate given to the President by the Filipino electorate.

For far too long, the Philippines has been unable to fully advance because of corruption in high and low places, the worsening crime situation and the prevalence of illegal drugs. Our people recognize the peril that those evils pose to our development and our democracy. Corruption has become the breeding ground for the illegal drug trade, which seriously threatens the country's peace and order. Furthermore, corruption impedes our sustainable development goals. It has torn apart many of our communities, destroyed families and snuffed out the hopes and dreams of our people, young and old, for a bright future. For that reason, we are determined to free the Philippines from corrupt and other outdated practices as we eradicate illicit drugs and their manufacture, distribution and use in the country. The rule of law and strict adherence to due process fully governs our campaign against

corruption and criminality, including the fight against illegal drugs.

Our firm belief in the supremacy of the law is given concrete expression through the State policy, enshrined in the Constitution, to fully respect human rights and the value and dignity of every person. We even have an independent Human Rights Commission tasked to investigate and prosecute all human rights violations in the country. That national commitment is amplified internationally, as the Philippines is party to eight of the nine core international human rights conventions. We recognize that a secure, stable, and prosperous Philippines will require a secure and stable rules-based international order to which it must faithfully comply.

With the imperative to forge policies for our people aimed at achieving enduring peace and prosperity and at restoring trust in the Government's ability to protect their fundamental rights and freedoms, the President, going into his third month in office, enjoys a 92 per cent rate of approval and trust from the Filipino people. To him, that trust is sacrosanct; under no circumstances can it be breached, under no circumstance must it be compromised.

Our actions have, however, grabbed both national headlines and international attention for all the wrong reasons. Consequently, we urge everyone to allow us to deal with our domestic challenges so that we can achieve our national goals without undue interference and so that we can be among the community of nations that can collectively make a universal push to transform our world and improve the quality of life for all of humanity, including the more than 100 million Filipinos. We urge everyone to have faith in the strong institutions of our democracy and in our people to defend the freedom and integrity of our country, and in the power of our people as they continue to freely participate, be involved and have a say in the actions and decisions of their democratically elected Government.

Let me repeat, explicitly and unequivocally, that the Philippines is committed to the rule of law and the protection of the rights of all Filipinos. With that abiding commitment, we are pursuing our efforts within the existing democratic and legal framework, which is governed by the overriding principle to uphold the dignity of every person and the right to due process and to the presumption of innocence. For the law to be credible, respected and effective, it has to be consistent and fair. The full force of the law will be applied at all

times to serve the ends of justice, and not just those of a select few. There will be no double standard, no application of selective justice.

Our campaign to rid the country of criminality, lawlessness and disorder, including our all-out war against illicit drugs, will remain strictly in accordance with the Philippine Constitution and the international norms and human rights treaties and covenants that we are party to. We have not empowered and never will empower our law-enforcement agents to shoot to kill individuals suspected of drug crimes. And yet, under our established rules of engagement, our police have the right to defend themselves when their lives are threatened. Extrajudicial killing has no place in our society nor in our criminal justice system.

Our sustainable goals rest on the fundamentals of development, that is, human development. The path of change that we seek is grounded in the most enduring of precepts, namely, our own national interest, which addresses the immediate needs of the Filipino people. Our goals are guided by our article of faith that we leave no one behind in our development strides. We are working hard to ensure that each and every Filipino will be able to keep in step with the overall development pace.

The Philippines continues to enhance the delivery and quality of basic social services to our people, anchored in the implementation of what we view as a human approach to development and governance. We have benchmarked such services to global standards. That is true of our health, education, food, water and housing services. Environmental preservation, respect for culture and the pursuit of social justice form key components of our national development frameworks.

Since 2013, the Philippines has made public its support for the core pillars of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Philippines is honoured to be one of the 22 pioneer countries that volunteered at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development to share its initiatives in the first year of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

If we are to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in 15 years, we need to take a risk-informed approach. It is axiomatic to say that frequent and intense natural disasters can negate our gains in the reduction of poverty and even push back development.

The Philippines is one of the most disaster-prone countries. It is also vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change owing to many years of neglect and selfish practices by various countries. This has left us far behind in progress, because of their irresponsibility and greed at our expense. We reiterate our call for climate justice and the principle of equity and common but differentiated responsibility in the implementation of the obligations under the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

The Philippines will remain a responsible partner of the international community. Our domestic concerns compel us to partner with like-minded countries in the areas of maritime security, counter-terrorism, disaster response and transnational crime such as, but not limited to, trafficking in drugs and humans. Our commitment to the rule of law, peace, our people and our relations with the international community also extends to the recent decision of the Arbitral Tribunal of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague with regard to disputes in the South China Sea. The decision has upheld the primacy of international law as the cornerstone for a rules-based regional and international order. The arbitral award, which is final and binding on all parties, is a clearly established legal fact that is now part of international jurisprudence in the maritime domain, in accordance with the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

We reaffirm our abiding commitment to pursue the peaceful resolution and management of disputes with a view to promoting and enhancing peace and stability in the region. We need to fully respect legal and diplomatic processes as we explore the best way forward. We reaffirm the need to enhance mutual trust and confidence. We must not overlook the importance of non-militarization and self-restraint in the conduct of all activities, including maintaining the freedom of navigation, the full and effective implementation of the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea and the adoption of an effective code of conduct.

Over the past 71 years, the United Nations has demonstrated continuing resilience and relevance in the face of intractable challenges and emerging regional threats, both traditional and non-traditional. With the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, the United Nations has rightly returned development to the centre of global efforts to pursue peace, security and stability.

The Philippines, as a founding Member of the United Nations, walks with and works with the community of nations in truly transforming our world, where the universal values of equality, tolerance and human dignity must prevail. As we reason together in this honoured Hall of the United Nations, let us together move our development goals forward. For us to build our future, we must honour our past. As we reaffirm our common humanity, we have to keep faith with one another as we advance our noblest and highest aspirations based on our collective will and pursue our varying and often disparate national interests.

Despite the odds and the complex challenges, we must press on, with courage and fortitude, for the sake of our peoples and seize the promise of a better tomorrow for future generations. Let us not forget — to borrow the words of a distinguished member of humankind — that in our determination to transform the world, it is not enough to see things as they are and ask, “Why?” Let us all dream of things that never were and ask, “Why not?”

The Acting President. I now call on His Excellency Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the United Arab Emirates.

Sheikh Al Nahyan (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*). At the outset, I am pleased to congratulate His Excellency Mr. Peter Thomson on his assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at its seventy-first session and to reaffirm the United Arab Emirates’ support for his efforts during his term. I would also like to express my thanks and appreciation to his predecessor, Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, for his wise leadership during the previous session.

In our region and beyond, several countries have confronted multiple ongoing crises and conflicts since 2011. A number of Arab countries, including Yemen, Libya, Iraq, Syria and Somalia, have descended into internal fighting. At the same time, the plight of the Palestinian people persists under Israeli occupation without a just solution on the horizon, one that could restore the rights stripped from the Palestinians and establish their State based on the June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Furthermore, regional interference in Arab affairs, perpetrated mainly by Iran — the only country in the world with a Constitution that explicitly calls for the export of its revolution — has aggravated conflicts in the region. The past few years have shown that solutions

based on crisis management are ineffective. Therefore, joint international efforts must focus on resolving the crises and conflicts — not just managing them.

We are all aware of the violence and terrorism around us, which have taken unprecedented forms, relying on heinous methods and causing fear and terror not only in the Middle East, but also in many countries worldwide. That demonstrates that violence and terrorism must no longer be associated with a single State or region, as they are global threats that recognize no borders. The serious challenges facing our region and many other countries require our joint consideration of ways to address them and reach consensual, timely, effective solutions, without undermining the ongoing significant efforts in that regard.

Countering terrorist groups is a right and duty of all States. However, resorting to laws that ignore the effective role played by a number of States in counter-terrorism would lead to suffering in many States. In that respect, we recall the so-called Justice against Sponsors of Terrorism Act in the United States of America, which has resulted in arbitrary policies and the destabilization of existing strong relationships among allies. I will attempt to present some thoughts on ways to diagnose the crises and determine potential solutions.

For example, Iraq has been suffering for more than a decade from nearly daily acts of sectarian violence. In addition, a part of its territory is under the control of terrorist groups, thus spreading fear and terror in the hearts of the Iraqi people and undermining the region’s integrity. Moreover, interference by Iran in Iraq’s internal affairs has exacerbated divisiveness among the Iraqi people. Yet there is no comprehensive political solution that can promote consensus among the Iraqi people and put an end to the marginalization of whole sections of Iraqi society.

What have the effective Powers done in that regard? What have the prominent Powers capable of addressing those serious crises done? Those Powers, or so-called super-Powers, have simply tried to minimize the impact without resolving the crisis. That approach has merely made the crises increasingly complex, with the collapse of State institutions and the emergence of terrorism and extremism. That has led to the high price being paid, especially in terms of the loss of life on the part of the region’s children, as well as their futures.

We find that Iran, as a result of its expansionist regional policies, has led the region to the brink of

disaster. Through its constant interference in the internal affairs of neighbouring countries, it has played the greatest role in causing tension and instability in the region. Despite the so-called nuclear agreement reached between Tehran and the P5+1 — which was welcomed by countries in the region in the hope that the deal would change Iran's hostile approach — and despite all of the optimistic expectations, we have faced a different reality in that Iran has wasted no time in pursuing efforts to undermine regional security through aggressive rhetoric, blatant interference, the training and arming of militias and the development of its ballistic missile programme. Iran has been designated a State sponsor of terrorism, in itself quite alarming. Yet, despite all of the above, Tehran has refused to rescind its policies, which means that in order to confront and solve the crises, we must deal with Iran's behaviour.

A further example of that trend can be seen in the decision of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to develop its nuclear and ballistic capacities and carry out regular testing, which threatens its neighbours' security, as well as international peace and security, and is clearly contrary to the most fundamental rules of international law. The same can be said of the crises in Libya, Syria, Yemen and Somalia. The lack of awareness of those crises and the lack of timely responses aimed at preventing the exacerbation of the suffering of many people are evident in the current developments in the Arab region, where the repercussions of certain crises have gone beyond borders.

The ensuing refugee crisis and mass exodus from conflict areas and the consequent pressures on many countries have indicated the need to work together within and beyond our region to develop solutions that rise above individual interests. That provides yet another example of how ignoring crises or settling for managing them, rather than finding tangible solutions, has further exacerbated the crises and transformed the situation into one that is more complex and compartmentalized.

Despite the gravity of the crises that we all face, finding solutions is not impossible, if the international community and interested sides demonstrate good will and the political determination to resolve them. Allow me, in that regard, to offer the following thoughts:

First, solutions must be based on justice and respect for the law. Without exception, no role should be given to any extremist, terrorist or evil party or group under

any circumstances. We call on Iran and all regional parties to abandon the evil role that they are playing, which incites sectarianism and further ignites tension. Secondly, we must attempt to resolve some of the fundamental crises in a number of countries in the region, which is key to finding solutions to other crises, particularly in Yemen and Libya.

In Yemen, there have been a number of initiatives, including an effective road map put forward by the legitimate Government of Yemen, now in Kuwait, and at the Quartet meeting held in Jeddah in August, that could have saved the Yemeni people from their suffering. We hope that those efforts can result in a political solution — if the intentions of the militias in Yemen are sincere and if they live up to the standards of the international community and uphold their responsibilities as Yemeni nationals.

The United Arab Emirates also welcomes the Skhirat Agreement reached by the parties in Libya, as well as the formation of the Government of National Accord. We hope that it will lead to constitution-building in Libya and strengthen cooperation between the Presidential Council and the House of Representatives, which are the legitimate representatives of the Libyan people. That would result in a more unified Libyan national Administration capable of protecting Libya's territorial integrity and maintaining the unity of the people.

The United Arab Emirates sees no possibility of resolving the Syrian crisis through anything other than a political solution. There is no possibility of resolving it through military force. To date, that path has only intensified the suffering of the fraternal people of Syria and led to increased flows of refugees to other countries. The crisis has been further complicated by interference on the part of Iran and its terrorist militias in Syrian affairs. That has distorted the vision for Syria and derailed it from the existing path.

Our hearts bleed when we see the brotherly people of Syria attempting to flee from death. We are deeply saddened that the Syrian people, known for their dignity and ancient civilization, are forced by the ongoing fighting in their country to fall into the hands of an unknown fate, a fate that began with forced displacement, with no end in sight. In addition, they experience humiliation as they are turned away from the borders of other countries. The repercussions of the Syrian crisis — and the impact of violence,

displacement and an uncertain future — will affect future generations of Syrians.

These examples affirm the regional view that settling for crisis management, repeating charitable humanitarian efforts or holding recurring international conferences will not substitute for solving those crises.

Despite the complexity of the crises overtaking our region, there is still hope for overcoming and resolving them. That is evident in the solutions adopted by the United Arab Emirates and the brotherly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which will, we hope, have a positive impact on other countries in the region. The United Arab Emirates firmly believes in the values of justice, international law, human rights and good governance. We wish to provide an enhanced environment of happiness for our citizens and residents. We believe that true development does not focus solely on the economic factors but also on the people themselves, based on the principles of tolerance, the acceptance of others and equality for all.

The empowerment of women is a central policy in my country, based on a belief in the pioneering societal role they play. The education of our citizens is also a priority, and we have developed policies and legislation to reflect that. We believe that the essential framework to achieve those goals should be based on protecting the State, in particular from extremism and sectarianism. That would solidify and strengthen our State against factors of disintegration and collapse that have threatened other countries in the region.

In that regard, we have established the Hedayah Centre to counter extremism and have participated with the United States in the establishment of the Sawab Centre. Additionally, the Muslim Council of Elders and the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies were established to show the true face of Islam. Those institutions aim to protect young people who have been attracted by extremist, sectarian and terrorist groups and counter the false claims of such groups.

The crisis in our region should not distract us from our core national cause, which is United Arab Emirates sovereignty over its three islands of Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa, which are being occupied by Iran against the provisions of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. My country has called on our neighbour Iran time and time again to return those occupied islands to their rightful owner, the United Arab Emirates, either voluntarily through

peaceful means or through international justice and arbitration, in order to maintain friendly, neighbourly relations in the Persian Gulf. We will never give up our sovereign right over those islands, and our approach is based on the principles of international law.

Our faith in the role of the United Nations and its organs, especially the Security Council, in maintaining international peace and security is unwavering. We expect the United Nations to play an effective and vital role in resolving conflicts, strengthening the ability of States to resolve conflicts through a framework based on respect for national sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of States.

To enable the Security Council to carry out that role, the Council members need to work together for the benefit and well-being of our region. In order to ensure that the United Nations is effective in a multipolar world, we must grant the General Assembly a greater role and pay more attention to early planning so as to promote security and stability. We can do that through constructive strategies and programmes that aim to achieve sustainable development, eradicate poverty, fight inequality, address climate change, defend human rights and much more.

We are firmly convinced that the effectiveness of the United Nations and its principal organs can be achieved through institutional cooperation with regional organizations, using clear mechanisms of cooperation, and that such cooperation is the cornerstone of the United Nations work.

The United Arab Emirates looks forward to working with the incoming Secretary-General with a view to promoting the work and effectiveness of the United Nations, so as to ensure further progress and find solutions to conflicts, as well as build the capacities required to maintain international peace and security.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Ibrahim Ahmed Abd al-Aziz Ghandour, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Sudan.

Mr. Ghandour (Sudan) (spoke in Arabic): It is my great pleasure, in my personal capacity as well as on behalf of the Government and the people of the Republic of the Sudan, to convey my desire for the successful outcome of these deliberations during this important session of the General Assembly. Our agenda is one of hope for a better and more prosperous future. We must

consider the issues of peace and security, development, human rights, and humanitarian matters in particular.

It is also my pleasure to express my congratulations to Mr. Peter Thomson, President of the General Assembly at its seventy-first session. I would also like to express our gratitude to Mr. Mogens Lykketoft for the skilful and wise manner in which he led the work of the Assembly at the previous session.

The high-level general debate of this session is taking place under the theme "The Sustainable Development Goals: a universal push to transform our world". That reflects the interest of the United Nations in realizing the hopes and aspirations of our countries and our peoples, in achieving sustainable development and prosperity for future generations, in eradicating poverty and disparities among people, and in protecting our planet and promoting sustainable development through international partnerships, where all stakeholders are involved. We hope that all stakeholders will respect their commitments to achieve that objective in order to avoid the repercussions of poverty, for we are aware that poverty, regardless of where it is, threatens prosperity throughout the world.

My country today reaffirms its unwavering commitment to the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. We reaffirm our interest in the need to continue efforts to reform this institution and develop its structures. We hope that the regional coalitions calling for General Assembly and Security Council reform do not go unheeded, so that the United Nations can truly become a platform for the implementation of international legality and a guarantor of justice and development throughout our world. I would like to reaffirm my country's commitment to dialogue with the international community aimed at strengthening values such as international justice and the fight against impunity through international mechanisms that are neither selective nor politicized.

In our view it is clear that the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), which should seek to enforce justice throughout the world, in fact hinders peace in its practical reality. That can be seen in the regions where it undertakes action, particularly in Africa. The African States therefore call for the drafting of a plan to collectively withdraw from the ICC. It is crucial that a distinction be drawn between justice and the politicization of justice.

To achieve peace, we have to strive to work together. This is one of our favourite topics. I would like to express our gratitude to all those who have endeavoured to achieve this very noble objective. Furthermore, I can confirm that we are going to knock on every single door of peace, and dialogue will be the only solution. Accordingly, my Government has spared no effort to ensure that peace prevails. Today, we are strengthening our social fabric and continuing our efforts aimed at rebuilding my country.

Thanks to God and thanks to the determination of my country and of the loyal people of the Sudan, Darfur has become a safe region, where peace and security have prevailed. The United Nations is a witness to this fact. The Government of the Sudan calls for the implementation of the plan for the withdrawal of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). I would like to reaffirm from this high rostrum that the Government of the Sudan reiterates its call to have UNAMID forces withdraw, for there are no more reasons for their presence there. Those forces could be deployed elsewhere to serve to consolidate peace in the parts of the world that truly need it.

The theme of the general debate of this session is "The Sustainable Development Goals: a universal push to transform our world". To achieve the objectives, purposes and principles implicit in this theme, we need to act together.

We also need to act together to achieve genuine momentum in bridging the food gap around the world. In this regard, I would like to recall the food security initiative launched by the President of the Republic, Mr. Omar Hassan Al-Bashir, during the third Arab Economic and Social Development Summit, in 2013. This initiative, which was subsequently adopted at the Sharm El-Sheikh summit in 2016, serves as one of the pillars for food security around the world. I call upon the United Nations and all specialized agencies to carry out the necessary studies to ensure the success of this initiative. We in the Sudan possess the necessary capabilities and skills to move forward on this universal push and stand ready to do so.

We wish to fulfil our commitments to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals with a view to guaranteeing a dignified life for all. But given the unjustified unilateral sanctions and the burden of our foreign debt, which stands at over \$40 billion, that will

not be easy. When one looks at the interest to be paid and the very complex contractual provisions, it is quite clear that 40 per cent of this debt is nothing more than interest growing on a yearly basis. That debt naturally hampers our country and its economic capabilities. In addition, the Sudan is not able to benefit from international financial support initiatives.

I would also like to state here that the agreement on the zero option for foreign debt, which we signed after South Sudan split from the Republic of the Sudan, terminated in 2014. The agreement was renewed for two years, but it is coming to an end this month, without the international commitments on our debts having been met since 2005. No progress has been made in terms of writing off those debts, even though my country was eligible for it.

The Sudan condemns the phenomenon of terrorism, which is why we have to deploy all our efforts and coordinate with other countries to contain the phenomenon. What do we need to do? We need to tackle the roots of the problem by finding just solutions for the international problems that fuel terrorism: exclusion, marginalization and the failure to uphold the rights of people who have been deprived of them. To that end, we have hosted a number of workshops, seminars and forums, the most recent of which was entitled "The Role of the Arab Media in Countering Terrorism". At that forum, held in Khartoum in August, the Khartoum Declaration was adopted. It reaffirms the importance of combating terrorism, the central role of religious discourse, and the need to ensure that educational curriculums focuses on tolerance and acceptance of the other. The media need to be used in the right way to fight this scourge.

Unfortunately, the future of our planet hinges on the fight against such phenomena as the trafficking in human beings, drug trafficking and other forms of transnational organized crime. These phenomena will be eradicated only if we pool the efforts of the international community and if the States of the world cooperate to stop these evils.

Because of the geographical situation of the Sudan, some have tried to take advantage of my country by making it a platform for trafficking in human beings and drug trafficking. With the help of the international community, we are doing everything we can to fight this exploitation, particularly by strengthening our law-enforcement capabilities and drafting the necessary

legislation to improve communication and coordination. Thanks be to God, we have made significant progress in this area despite the lack of resources.

Israel continues to reject all initiatives aimed at achieving the two-State solution, which is why we have to do everything we can to terminate the last colonial regime in the world. We have to work to implement the two-State solution and create a sovereign Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

We attach the greatest importance to the safety, security and stability of South Sudan, for we have historical blood ties with that country. Together with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and with our partners on the African continent and in the international community we will spare no effort to back our brothers in South Sudan and ensure that peace and security prevail in that country.

With an eye to calming all other hotbeds of tension around the world, we call for a peaceful solution to the crisis in Syria. We must move away from any solution that involves force. We must preserve the territorial integrity of Syria. With respect to Yemen, we reaffirm our support to the Government of President Abdrabuh Mansour Hadi Mansour. With respect to Libya, we reaffirm our support for the Government of President Faiez Mustafa Serraj and will spare no effort to preserve the territorial integrity, security and stability of the country and protect its resources.

I also wish to reaffirm the basic principle of our foreign policy, which is non-interference in the affairs of others. We reaffirm our support for the stability of South Sudan and the Central African Republic. We call upon the international community to spare no effort and to leave no stone unturned in helping these countries overcome the difficulties they are facing. The Sudan calls for dialogue and the renunciation of the use of force when it comes to managing and settling conflicts around the world.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Prak Sokhonn, Senior Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Kingdom of Cambodia.

Mr. Sokhonn (Cambodia) (*spoke in French*): I should like to cordially congratulate His Excellency Mr. Peter Thomson of the Republic of Fiji on his election as President of the Assembly at its seventy-first session. With a representative from a country that is famous

for the quality of its rugby leading our work, we can be assured that our work will be masterfully refereed. I wish to join those who have already expressed our collective gratitude to His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, who in his capacity as Secretary-General has spared no effort to preserve peace where it is threatened and to restore it where violence is raging. The limitations that he encountered during his tenure were not his own, but those of a United Nations in need of reform.

The general debate provides us with an opportunity to take stock of humankind and our planet. Each and every one of us must make an effort to express the concerns and expectations of our peoples. We are the voices of the world. To say that the world is doing well, however, would not be credible. It must be noted that the outstanding progress made in science and technology has not been used to serve peace or the well-being of humankind.

There is a word that summarizes the tragedy of our world: violence. I speak here of wartime violence, terrorist violence, violence towards civilians and, tragically, towards children, violence towards other living species that are disappearing in large numbers, and violence towards the planet, which is suffering from a degree of turmoil that is threatening the survival of humankind itself, such as we know it today.

How is it that in the twenty-first century we are still facing these kinds of challenges? It is not enough to simply observe what is already clearly evident. We must understand these problems and respond to them. Our generation and, above all, future generations deserve a better world. Time restraints require that I focus on just a few topics.

I would first of all like to address collective security. The world is reeling from an outbreak of conflicts ravaging the Near and Middle East, but in other regions of the world as well. It is no less anxious about new tensions in other strategic regions of the planet, as the abuse of the right to intervene has catastrophic consequences that destabilize States and entire regions. We observe the opening up of new global divisions characterized by policies of containment, which causes States to mobilize military means and results in new alliances that exclude certain other States.

The world became unipolar in 1991 and has since moved towards greater multipolarity, which has naturally generated strong resistance and troubling

types of behaviour. Should countries large in size, population or economic power be absent from the Security Council? It is clear that the system of collective security that was implemented in 1945, and which was adapted to the bipolar world left in the wake of the Cold War, is now in great distress.

A small country such as my own too often feels pressure to choose sides and tries to reach understandings with other countries in order to give a voice to those who are scarcely listened to and who are always the first to suffer from geopolitical decisions. We have travelled that road before and have been subjected to a proxy war. Moreover, we cannot simply articulate the anguish of new escalating dangers. Together with all countries that are willing, we want to work to strike a new global balance that respects the realities of the twenty-first century. When tensions do emerge, we believe that our role is not to become embroiled in them but to enter into dialogue and do everything we can to contribute to the peaceful solution of disputes.

Current events force me to address the issue of terrorism and, more specifically, its root causes. Is such fanaticism not just the violent expression of anger? Such anger must be analysed. There are too many injustices and inequalities in our world. More importantly, there is an overly systematic two-tier system when it comes to decision-making. International law is imposed on some while others are exempted. With regard to religion, each Government must ensure, as we have successfully done in Cambodia, that members of all faiths can peacefully and respectfully live together in tolerance.

How can we overlook the tragedy of the Palestinian people, whose rights have been violated for 70 years? This tragedy has fed the revolt in the Arab world and hatred among the most indignant. An entire population's rights have been denied for decades. When faced with such a fact, how can we not understand that discourse on universal values and international law is no longer credible?

We hold no illusions; terrorism will be eradicated only when the principal reasons for becoming a terrorist no longer exist.

I would like to make a short comment on the economy. We now have sufficient experience in that area to evaluate the globalization born from World Trade Organization agreements and subsequent free trade agreements. Such experience has allowed us to make progress through the liberalization of markets,

but it has also shown us that real dangers emerge when corporations are given rights that allow them to conduct their business in any way they see fit. Continuous blackmail in favour of offshoring is a major obstacle to a country like mine, where we are working to improve working conditions and the standard of living, which remains low.

I wish to share in the collective satisfaction following the agreement last December at the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. We also welcome the fact that the two principal contributors to global warming have confirmed their involvement and determination. Sometimes deception is employed when it comes to respecting treaties, but it is an undeniable truth that we cannot deceive our planet. If the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties does not lead to concrete actions taken by all parties, there will be terrible and unstoppable consequences, leading to a series of destructive phenomena that will create new levels of suffering.

I now turn to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development embodies a series of very ambitious objectives. Such ambitions need to be matched, however, with a corresponding level of true political will. In that regard, I would like to highlight the responsibility of wealthy countries, which have the necessary resources to make the Goals a reality. Although the world has indeed made great progress in terms of human development since 1990, we should pay particular attention to two facts provided by the United Nations Development Programme: there are more than 2 billion people living in poverty in the world and 1.2 billion people living on less than \$1.25 per day. If we take into consideration those two figures alone, the 17 SDGs become even more urgent.

I would like to conclude by speaking about my country, Cambodia. International institutions, Western parliamentarians and some Western non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have pointed the finger and tried to lay blame. However, I do not come before the Assembly as an accused party. I am addressing those present on behalf of a country that is often judged negatively, and even more often unrecognized and misunderstood, especially by the Western world. I come here with confidence. Many of us here refuse to see the international community conflated with the Western community and its opinions.

I am a survivor of the atrocities of Pol Pot and of a country that was turned into an immense forced labour camp. After United States Air Force bombers completely destroyed us, our country endured the extreme suffering brought on by one of the cruelest regimes of the twentieth century. I must therefore recall that in the wake of such affliction in Cambodia in 1979, Viet Nam was the only member of the international community to respond to the call of those fleeing the genocidal regime. Our population of 8 million inhabitants in 1970 had been reduced to some 4.5 million by 1979. The State, central and local Governments, hospitals, schools, our currency and religion had all ceased to exist. The roads were damaged and infrastructure and institutions had disappeared. In 1979, all that remained in Cambodia were 8 of our 750 lawyers, 45 of our 450 doctors and 7,000 of our 22,000 teachers. A total of 54 per cent of all medical personnel were gone, and of our 1,600 agricultural technicians, only 200 were still alive.

In 1979, the survivors were in extremely debilitated physical and mental states. Nevertheless, they were still punished for having been freed by a country that had done nothing to please the coalition that for over 11 years caused total destruction in the country, traumatized the survivors and imposed a crippling embargo that prohibited all development aid. We had nothing and we were deprived of everything. Given that, Members of the Assembly might wonder why would I want to bring up the past. I do so because it is a past that is not yet in the past. How do we not understand that the past continues to deeply affect the present? How do we not understand that the past continues to weigh upon us today in terms of human resources?

In the West, some NGOs, media and Governments describe even our slightest shortcomings as crimes of the State. With the Paris accords, we were obliged to accept a perfect model of democracy that took no account of the specificities of our country or the human resources required to implement it. We are now being criticized for disregarding the rights of the opposition. At the same time, however, the western NGOs and Governments that support the political opposition claim that we are violating our laws and not punishing crimes that undermine our national security, such as defamation, calumny, incitement to racial hatred and the production of fake treaties and identification cards. Meanwhile, it is the opposition that is committing these crimes.

We have made considerable progress in education, health care and infrastructure. Similarly, we have successfully fought AIDS and malaria. We have undertaken a long and difficult fight against corruption. Our Ministries of the Environment and Agriculture are striving to correct the mistakes that have been made with respect to forestry licenses. The poverty rate has dropped every year by 1 per cent and we have experienced an average growth rate of more than 7 per cent since 1994.

In Cambodia, we are addressing an issues that can truly hinder sustainable development — mines and explosive remnants of war. We have made the eradication of these deadly devices an eighteenth Sustainable Development Goal in Cambodia, similar to what we did with the Millennium Development Goals. Our country, which has gained has considerable and painful experience in demining, has been participating in peacekeeping operations by sending demining contingents since 2006. Currently, more than 900 women and men of these contingents, as well as engineers, doctors and military police, are working in Lebanon, Mali, the Central African Republic, the Sudan and South Sudan.

Regarding climate change, I am pleased to announce that just yesterday we completed the procedure of ratifying the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

We have known the extreme horrors of war. More than others, we understand the price of peace, and we prioritize peaceful conflict resolution in all circumstances, sometimes at the risk of being misunderstood. Lastly, our exceptionally difficult past has made us part and parcel of the network of States that are committed to preventing mass crimes. To that end, and with regard to the responsibility to protect (R2P), we have designated the individual who will be our national correspondent to the Global Network of R2P Focal Points, proposed by the United Nations.

Based on this assessment, does our country deserve to be subjected to Western obloquy? We will let those present be the judges.

The Acting President: I now call on Her Excellency Ms. Maxime Pamela Ometa McClean, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Barbados.

Ms. McClean (Barbados): I am pleased today to congratulate Mr. Thomson on his assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at its seventy-

first session. The Government of Barbados is pleased that Fiji, a fellow small island developing State (SIDS), has been elevated to such an important office. Forty-six years ago, the Prime Minister of Barbados, The Honourable Errol Walton Barrow, in his address to this body, congratulated Fiji on its attainment of independence (see A/PV.1866). He pointed out that Barbados was especially pleased to have been one of the sponsors of resolution 2622 (XXV), admitting Fiji to the United Nations. I assure the President of the full support and cooperation of the Barbados delegation as he discharges his duties.

I extend sincere thanks to his predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, for his steady guidance of the work of the General Assembly during its seventieth session.

I also take this opportunity to recognize the contribution of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, whose tenure is drawing to an end. Secretary-General Ban has been a dedicated and committed leader of the Organization. He has been a friend of SIDS, including Barbados. The Government of Barbados extends sincere appreciation for his dedicated global service during a turbulent but productive period.

The seventy-first session is of deep significance to Barbados. It coincides with the celebration this year of two historic anniversaries. On 30 November, we celebrate our fiftieth anniversary of independence and nationhood, followed closely by our fiftieth anniversary of membership in the United Nations.

One of the cornerstones on which the foreign policy of Barbados is built is our unwavering commitment to the United Nations. We see the United Nations as the core of an effective multilateral system, with responsibility for addressing issues of international peace, security and development. Today, 50 years on, Barbados stands more firmly committed to the principle of multilateralism. For the United Nations to deliver on our expectations, its organizational structure must reflect the geopolitical realities of the twenty-first century. We therefore support efforts to reform the Security Council and to revitalize the General Assembly.

The theme of this year's General Assembly is "The Sustainable Development Goals: a universal push to transform our world". We must act now to make the vision of 2030 a reality. Barbados believes that partnership and collaboration will be the keys to fulfilling the promise

of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. That is especially true for SIDS.

The Prime Minister of Barbados, Mr. Freundel Stuart, addressed this theme in his statement to the Alliance of Small Island States Leaders' Conference, held in the margins of the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States in September 2014. Prime Minister Stuart highlighted the importance of United Nations support for the implementation of the SIDS Agenda. We therefore welcome the progress made by the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) in its comprehensive review of the United Nations system's support for SIDS, and we look forward to tangible improvements as a result of its work.

Last week, I was pleased to participate in the launch, in Barbados, of the *Caribbean Human Development Report 2016*. The theme of the report is "Multidimensional progress: human resilience beyond income". It highlights the unique situation of the small island developing States and low-lying coastal States in the Caribbean. Three central issues stand out: vulnerability, resilience and sustainability. Barbados welcomes the report. It validates the consistent call by the Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), and of SIDS in general, for SIDS to be recognized as a special case for sustainable development.

The Government of Barbados is devising and implementing effective strategies to strengthen social, economic and environmental resilience that is consistent with our national growth and development philosophy. It is based on supporting a Barbados that is socially balanced, economically viable, environmentally sound, and characterized by good governance — our four strategic pillars. We are therefore pleased that Barbados is already pursuing the ideals enshrined in Agenda 2030.

The existential threat which climate change poses to small island developing States like Barbados is well documented. We are a leading advocate for coordinated action at the international level to address the sources and consequences of our vulnerability. The Prime Minister of Barbados was one of the leaders who participated in the formal signing ceremony of the landmark Paris Agreement on Climate Change in April. He deposited the instrument of ratification on the same occasion. We look forward to its early entry into force. At the national level, Barbados has developed a national

climate change policy framework that works seamlessly with the Barbados sustainable development policy to address issues of climate adaptation and mitigation.

Barbados exercises jurisdiction over maritime space that far exceeds its very limited land territory. We therefore recognize the vast potential of the ocean and its sustainable exploitation as an important component of our future development. We are also developing a comprehensive national ocean governance strategy to address the sustainable management of our maritime space and the sustainable use of Barbados' marine living and non-living resources.

As we seek to protect and preserve our oceans and seas for future generations, Barbados will continue to participate actively in the various oceans-related processes of the United Nations. During the current session, my delegation will collaborate with other members of the Association of Caribbean States to strengthen the level of support for the Caribbean Sea resolution. Our ultimate aim is the designation of the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development. We count on your support.

Barbadians are a proud and industrious people. With minimal natural resources and the constraints of small size and vulnerability to natural and man-made disasters, our people have achieved a significant level of human development in 50 years of independence. We have done so by dint of hard work, sacrifice and faith. We remain resolute in our determination to overcome the many obstacles we face: the unilateral and unidimensional graduation policies of international development agencies that penalize us for progress in human development, while ignoring our obvious vulnerabilities; the negative impact of the economic and financial decisions of international financial and other institutions, illustrated by the consequences of de-risking on correspondent banking activity; and the persistent and unwarranted attacks on our international financial services sector, accompanied by the imposition of onerous conditionalities. Those actions threaten our economic stability and our ability to participate in global financial, trade and economic systems. They undermine our capacity to achieve the full implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. We call for dialogue with development partners and greater policy space and policy flexibility for SIDS.

The United Nations was born of the post-war desire of nations for international peace and security.

Barbados is a firm proponent of the rule of law at the national, regional and international levels. We reiterate our commitment to maintaining the Caribbean as a zone of peace. In that context, Barbados reaffirms its unwavering support for the territorial integrity of fellow CARICOM States Belize and Guyana. We call for definitive solutions to their long-standing disputes with neighbouring States Guatemala and Venezuela. Barbados welcomes the recent steady progress towards the normalization of bilateral relations between Cuba and the United States of America. We look forward to the dismantling of the final vestiges of that long-standing embargo.

On that memorable evening on 30 November 1966, as the national flag of Barbados was unfurled for the first time, there was a sense of exultation, expectation and pride. Our first Prime Minister stated in his first address to the General Assembly:

"Humility must be the most appropriate feeling for the leader of a State admitted to membership of this illustrious Assembly on the basis of sovereign equality." (*A/PV.1487, para. 72*)

Half a century later, we believe that both independence and membership in the United Nations have served us well and afforded us the opportunity to pursue the goals which have informed the progress that we have achieved. Looking forward, we are committed to the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda. We expect it to guarantee further development of the Barbadian economy and society and to serve as our contribution to the universal push to transform our world.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Alain Aimé Nyamitwe, Minister for External Relations and International Cooperation of the Republic of Burundi.

Mr. Nyamitwe (Burundi) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank our Lord, who has watched over us on our journey and enabled us to be here for this important meeting of the United Nations.

On behalf of Mr. Pierre Nkurunziza, President of the Republic of Burundi, and of the entire Burundian people, I would like to congratulate Mr. Peter Thomson, a worthy son of Fiji, on his election on 13 June to the presidency of the General Assembly at its seventy-first session. He will always be able to count on Burundi's full cooperation during his tenure. I also commend

Mr. Mogens Lykketoft for his excellent work in presiding with brio over the seventieth session, which he brought to a delightful close on 13 September.

I would also like to reiterate our confidence in Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. Burundi will cooperate fully with him during the remainder of his term and wishes him health, happiness and every success in his future work. We would also like to convey our best wishes to the new Secretary-General, who will be starting at a very important moment for the world.

(*spoke in English*)

Regarding the inter-Burundian dialogue, the Government of Burundi has participated in every meeting held at the invitation of the facilitator of the East African Community (EAC). I would like to inform the Assembly that on 8 September, the facilitator, Mr. Benjamin Mkapa, former President of the United Republic of Tanzania, presented his report to the EAC summit, calling for a renewed commitment on the part of all stakeholders to engaging in the EAC-led dialogue. The Government of the Republic of Burundi is of the view that the dialogue should not replace or undermine the democratic tenets of the country's Constitution, while it reaffirms its commitment to the dialogue, as expressed at the last EAC summit.

We believe that peaceful political stakeholders, in accordance with the provisions of Security Council resolutions 2248 (2015) and 2279 (2016), are welcome to discuss the future of Burundi. By the same token, and with a view to opening up to greater inclusivity, our national commission for inter-Burundian dialogue has submitted its report on six months of discussions with Burundians from all walks of life, from grassroots communities to the upper echelons of society. Our citizens have called for a number of major reforms for improving Burundi's stability that cannot be ignored, and the Government has taken note of them.

I stand before the Assembly today to reiterate Burundi's unwavering commitment to human rights. A well-regarded national commission and fully fledged ministerial department are in charge of human rights, and we should support them. The Government wishes to reaffirm its commitment to ensuring the security of all our citizens, regardless of their ethnic origin. None of the three ethnic groups is above the others, nor is any group a pariah. As established in our Constitution, all our citizens have equal opportunities.

Currently in Burundi, we are working to consolidate security gains in the face of numerous actors with only one goal — regime change — and whose methods are uniformly violent. It is crucial to ensure great caution in assessing the situation. The fact is that rumors, false information and social media, have all been used to portray Burundi in a bad light. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to categorically reject the deliberately politically exaggerated reports of alleged human rights violations in Burundi. Some cases have been taken out of context and others blown out of proportion, with no mention of the security personnel who have been killed while on duty. The report I refer to (A/HRC/32/30) is marred by its controversial selection of victims, while the method of collecting testimony through WhatsApp messages is a departure from United Nations practices. Our Government will take the opportunity to present a comprehensive counter-report in Geneva in the next few days.

On the other hand, Burundi would like to reiterate its openness to the African Union's human rights monitors and military experts. The financial and structural challenges that the African Union Commission is dealing with, which have stalled the generation of the necessary personnel, are not our fault. Regarding the memorandum of understanding between Burundi and the Commission, my Government calls on the Commission to uphold fully and in good faith the terms of the agreement reached in Bujumbura during the meeting in February of the six African Union Heads of State and Government.

Regarding Security Council resolution 2303 (2016), adopted under Chapter VI of the Charter of the United Nations, Burundi was shocked by the lack of consensus and the surprise manner in which it was adopted. While the consultations before the adoption did not result in full approval of the penholder's proposal, some Council members thought that Burundi's consent should be obtained before creating a *fait accompli*. Resolutions under Chapter VI of the Charter are predicated on the consent of the Government concerned.

Where the humanitarian situation is concerned, our Government has made the return of refugees a priority. We are aware of the extremely difficult conditions they are living in, mostly in neighbouring countries, and we will spare no effort to enable every one of them to return home. We have guaranteed the security of their goods and property, and around 90,000 refugees have voluntarily returned home over the past four months.

I would like to urge all our neighbours to help to facilitate their voluntary repatriation. The Government of the Republic of Burundi is in discussions with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on launching tripartite negotiations with the host countries.

Also in line with the relevant provisions of resolutions 2248 (2015) and 2279 (2016), and in order to comply with the 2013 Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, the Government of the Republic of Burundi calls on all its neighbours to refrain from aiding and abetting the violent schemes of some groups, especially those that failed in their bid on 13 May 2015 to overthrow Burundi's democratic institutions and attacked us on 10 July 2015. The report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2016/466), submitted to the Security Council a few months ago, is comprehensive and clear on the activities of those groups, which have attacked Burundi more than once, and my Government urges the Council to act on those findings.

Regarding United Nations reform, Africa, along with other regions of the world, has called for reform of our Organization's bodies, particularly the Security Council, again and again. Decision 62/557 paved the way for instituting negotiations on reform. As countless delegations have pointed out, it is absolutely unacceptable that, more than seven decades after its creation, our Organization is still functioning with the same post-war mindset, with a few Members claiming more rights than the rest. The Government of the Republic of Burundi fully supports the African Union position outlined in the Ezulwini Consensus.

Our Organization needs a new impetus. However, there are some steps that can be taken even before that goal is reached. For instance, the three African non-permanent members of the Council should be given more responsibilities and allowed to work independently. If more than 70 per cent of the situations under consideration by the Council originate in Africa, it is not too much to ask that the so-called penholders be African countries, especially in light of the sometimes biased views of Africa entertained by some Council members.

The shock and horror of the images we have seen of migrants seeking refuge in Europe are a constant reminder to all of us that while the world we live in

may be one of shared opportunities it is also one of shared challenges. While we call on countries of destination to demonstrate more humanity in catering to migrants, we believe it is important to analyse the deep-rooted causes of such mass exoduses of the young men, women and children who find it necessary to risk their lives on the open sea in search of better opportunities. One way of reducing the problem is by supporting well-intentioned development programmes undertaken by the countries of the South. As their social and economic situation improves, more people will find reasons to stay in their own countries, but that can happen only if we all understand that we must respect the political, social, economic and cultural fabric of every country. Unfortunately, that is not always the case today.

This year's general debate is taking place at a time when terrorism is affecting the entire world and has hit every region. Some progress has been made, but we have to recognize the fact that efforts to develop a common strategy have not yet yielded the hoped-for results. Terrorist attacks have shaken countries in every corner of the world and touched all of us. My country is concerned about the surge in such attacks, and my Government, as always, condemns terrorism in all its manifestations and sympathizes with its victims. We believe that we must wage the fight against terrorism with greater determination.

Matching its words with deeds, Burundi has been sending troops to fight terrorism and violent extremism in many parts of the world since 2007. More than 5,000 Burundian troops are in Somalia fighting Al-Shabaab as part of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). Our continued presence there is proof of Burundi's firm commitment to combating terrorism, in full solidarity with our brothers and sisters on the continent and beyond. We believe that the fight against terrorism anywhere is a contribution to global peace.

Despite the fact that two formed police units from Burundi were not rotated into the Central African Republic for politically motivated reasons, we remain committed to peace and security, and our men and women in uniform are still prepared to serve in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic with the same zeal that has been shown by our police units in Côte d'Ivoire, Haiti and Darfur. Our only interest is in helping our brothers and sisters to recover their dignity and freedom. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the partners that have continued

to support such missions. As a troop-contributing country, Burundi urges the United Nations to fill the gap left by the cuts in the European Union's budget for AMISOM.

Burundi has also participated in other initiatives, such as the European Union action plan on chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear security, aimed at preventing terrorist groups and non-State actors from acquiring substances that could be used for terrorist purposes. However, none of those initiatives can help us defeat terrorism if structural causes such as inequality and poverty are not dealt with. People need to be able to put bread on the table.

My delegation would like to note here how essential it is that all Member States incorporate the 17 Sustainable Development Goals into the design of their policies, programmes and budgets. For its part, Burundi is committed to putting its citizens at the centre of its development policies. With its partners' valuable support, the Government of Burundi is working to respond to the needs of its most vulnerable citizens as inclusively as possible. We are working together with every country on the planet to promote and implement a sustainable, durable regime on climate, as well as a legally binding instrument, and we must make sure we consolidate the gains achieved on that epoch-making day of 21 December 2015. In a few months, Burundi will join those countries that have already ratified the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

On 13 October 1961 in Bujumbura, our then Prime Minister, His Royal Highness Louis Rwagasore, the hero of our independence, was assassinated by elements close to the colonial administration as he presided over his first and last cabinet meeting. On 15 January 1965, Pierre Ngendandumwe, our Prime Minister, was gunned down in Bujumbura by a local embassy staffer. On 21 October 1993, Melchior Ndadaye, the first democratically elected President of Burundi, was assassinated by army troops from one ethnic group. On 13 May 2015, a bid to overthrow Burundi's legitimate institutions failed. What all those sad events have in common, however, is the unhealthy and obvious involvement of foreign elements. And we should not forget that President Ntaryamira died in a foreign land when the plane carrying him and the then-President of Rwanda was shot down on 6 April 1994.

In that regard, it is important to remember that African societies are highly complex. What Burundi is

asking for is to be seen fairly, on its own terms, not through the lenses of other situations in other countries. We do not welcome any kind of foreign interference in our affairs, because Burundi has been flying the flag of a sovereign State since 1 July 1962, however difficult that may be for some to understand.

Three communities live in our beautiful land, bordered on the west by majestic Lake Tanganyika, the world's second deepest, and by two other countries to the north and east. The Hutu, Tutsi and Twa peoples live in harmony in Burundi and have an equal say in the affairs of Government, as provided for in the Constitution of the Republic of Burundi. No group is above or below another.

It is crucial to take into account the suffering and pain that our people endured as a result of bad leadership in the past. The wounds left by the massacres of the past remind us to treat all our citizens the same way, with no distinctions between classes or groups. Victims know no majority or minority — their pain is the same. We therefore refuse to manipulate or falsify history. Our citizens continue to mourn their loved ones, lost to ignorance and the barbaric practices of the military regimes that overthrew the monarchy and proclaimed a republic. For more than 40 years, the various Burundi Administrations in Burundi busied themselves segregating and killing citizens on the basis of their ethnicity.

The Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement of 2000 and our 2005 Constitution defined the place of all citizens in the country's administration, in what was seen to be an equitable way of ensuring peace and stability. Those tenets are still in place today, and the Arusha Agreement is fully respected in our institutions. Similarly, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission envisaged in the Arusha Agreement has now been established. We therefore call on the United Nations to support the Commission's work. The Burundi people now have a forum that can address the sad events in their history. They need to know why their nation changed from being one in which different ethnic communities lived in harmony to one in which citizens lost their lives because of their ethnic origins. The process will enable us to tap into the knowledge resources of the United Nations, which entrusted the administration of Burundi to a third country.

Lastly, our people — the Hutu, the Tutsi and the Twa — want only to live in peace and harmony. They

unanimously reject genocidal rhetoric. They form one single society, one nation. They share a faith in their common future, which they want to be peaceful and prosperous, one of equal opportunity. As President Pierre Nkurunziza has said time and again, there will be no genocide in the Republic of Burundi. That is our faith and the faith of all our people. And we, the people of Burundi, will fight that evil with every possible means.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Abdusalam Hadliye Omer, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Investment Promotion of the Federal Republic of Somalia.

Mr. Omer (Somalia): On behalf of my Government and my people, it is an honour and a privilege for me to address the General Assembly at its seventy-first session. I bring warm greetings and good wishes from our President, His Excellency Mr. Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, and our Prime Minister, Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke, our entire Government and the people of the Federal Republic of Somalia.

At the outset, I would like to congratulate His Excellency Mr. Peter Thomson, President of the General Assembly at its seventy-first session, for his excellent leadership. I wish him well in all his duties.

I also pay a special tribute to His Excellency Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who has truly championed development across the world in all its forms. In his two terms as Secretary-General we have seen a smooth transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals and the encouragement of greater, more innovative cross-sectoral partnerships for achieving progress for all. Whoever succeeds him as Secretary-General certainly has big shoes to fill.

The United Nations is indeed the foremost platform for nations of the world to come together as a community of nations to discuss and tackle the greatest challenges of our time. Those challenges are clear and require robust and coordinated international action to overcome. No one nation, no matter how powerful or resourceful, can alone address the grave challenges posed by climate change, terrorism, poverty and the large movements of refugees and migrants, as well as conflict. More important, no one nation today can claim that many of those great challenges are "not in my backyard; therefore, I do not need to act". In an age of globalization, interconnectivity and interdependence

there is a duty incumbent upon us all to work even more closely together to protect and to advance the common interests of all humankind.

The Government of Somalia is truly committed to the Charter of the United Nations and the values of justice, peace and progress for all. Furthermore, our Government is immersed in laying the groundwork for the successful implementation of the crucial 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with a focus on peace and security, good governance and economic and social development through innovative partnerships at home. We are determined, in the interest of our mutual national and regional development and progress, to ensure that no one is left behind. Leaving people behind, especially the most vulnerable in our societies, would lead to incomplete progress and signify division and a lack of social solidarity among our peoples and within our nations.

Somalia is a country that I dearly love, represent and serve. I am proud to say that all our partners, allies and friends across the world have recognized both the potential and the strategic value of our country for international security, trade and the promotion of democracy and good governance internationally. More important, during this week's high-level meeting on Somalia, held on the margins of the General Assembly meetings, the Government of the Federal Republic of Somalia and our key international partners exchanged views on the current progress and the remaining challenges in our country. I am glad to report that our partners have both recognized and pledged to continue supporting Somalia's fruitful journey towards democratization, stability and sustainable development.

Somalia is taking bold and unprecedented steps towards a better future. That historic move towards progress and empowerment is driven by our resilient people, our determined central Government and all our valuable international partners. After nearly two decades of difficulties and instability, Somalia has negotiated a permanent turn towards progress and prosperity. We are writing a new chapter in our history, one that is characterized by hope, inclusive governance and development.

I am proud to say that our Government, in cooperation with our people and valuable partners, has made tangible progress on the key issues of elections, the configuration of the State, security and economic development. Despite our fruitful cooperation with

and gratitude to, our international partners and friends, the Somali Government and the people take full responsibility for their own future in every way. Therefore, the Somali Government and the people — the ultimate stakeholders and beneficiaries of progress in the country — are stepping up to the many challenges so as to ensure that our country and people fulfil their potential and that of their beautiful and rich home.

Somalia is winning the war against international terrorism at home and contributing to the creation of a safer world through cooperation on security with international partners across the world. With the support of our brave Somali national security services and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), we have militarily defeated the evil that is Al-Shabaab. Defeating international terrorism is a fundamental priority for Somalia, as those murderous criminals pose a genuine threat to us all and our way of life. The threat of terrorism is indeed international, as no country, regardless of its abilities, can insulate itself from that threat, given the new technologies and the fluidity of borders. Terrorism is truly a pointless evil without geography and without respect for the sanctity of human life. We can and must defeat it through partnerships across all international sectors. During the past four years, the Somali National Army and AMISOM have regained key towns and cities across Somalia. Today Al-Shabaab controls less than 10 per cent of the territory of the country. In recent months many of their key leaders have been eliminated. Others have defected, and their violent ideology is truly shunned by the Somali people. Somali national forces and AMISOM have proven that Al-Shabaab is vulnerable and divided, and can be defeated through coordinated military action.

As a result of the success of the joint operations of the Somali National Army and AMISOM, Al-Shabaab has turned to small-team, asymmetric warfare tactics in order to conduct terrorist attacks against soft targets in Somalia and, increasingly, in neighbouring countries. In response, our Government is working with our partners and neighbours to enhance security cooperation so as to enable us to respond to the threat, together and swiftly. Whereas before 2012 Al-Shabaab was engaged in open warfare with the Somali armed forces and AMISOM, today they are limited to undertaking infrequent, desperate and opportunistic suicide attacks on mosques, hotels, restaurants and businesses, as well as carrying out the assassination of innocent citizens.

That is the best evidence of their moral bankruptcy, ideological falsehood and diminished capabilities.

The Federal Republic of Somalia and our people are grateful to the troop-contributing countries in AMISOM for their support in stabilizing our country. We thank the brotherly States of Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Burundi and Nigeria for contributing to the AMISOM forces and the police contingent. We fully recognize the sacrifices that their service personnel have made, and continue to make, in the service of Somalia and its people's future. I can assure the Assembly that their valour and distinguished service will never be forgotten. In fact, it is and will always be honoured in our national development.

While we are grateful to AMISOM and our international partners for their diverse security-sector assistance, we fully understand that the only way we can truly achieve long-term stability and development, both in Somalia and across the region, is to have well-trained, equipped and funded Somali national security forces, which we hope to achieve ahead of the agreed deadline under which AMISOM will draw down in 2018. From all of that, it should be clear that the Somali Government and the people are committed to, and are leading the creation of, a safer Somalia, region and world.

On the matter of countering violent extremism, effectively countering the poisonous ideologies of hate that radicalize vulnerable young people is crucial in order to achieve permanent peace in Somalia and across the world. On 12 September His Excellency Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, President of Somalia, officially launched the national strategy and action plan for preventing and countering violent extremism for Somalia. Somalia is pleased that that inclusive process, which began more than 10 months ago, has successfully concluded with a comprehensive national strategy and action plan for preventing and countering violent extremism. The document is the result of a rigorous and inclusive process of dialogue and discussion with all the key stakeholders that lasted up to the point of its adoption by the Somali Government. The national strategy and action plan for preventing and countering violent extremism provides a holistic framework for addressing domestic and international security threats, including terrorism. With the completion of that vital strategy, Somalia has now fulfilled the call of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for each Member State

to develop an action plan and strategy for preventing violent extremism.

The Federal Government of Somalia, in consultation with the federal states — which were all formed democratically starting in 2012, with one currently undergoing the process — has adopted a credible, transparent and inclusive electoral mechanism that we hope will pave the way for universal suffrage by 2020. The Somali people are excited by that positive move towards democracy, and the various electoral commissions, as well as the Somali people in general, are working tirelessly on the implementation of the electoral mechanism in line with the agreed time line.

As I speak, many aspiring parliamentarians are returning to their constituencies to win over voters so that they can represent them in the next Parliament. Billboards depicting presidential hopefuls seeking to win the hearts and minds of the Somali people line the roads and streets ahead of the election. That is a truly historic leap forward in terms of democratization in Somalia and provides clear evidence of the spirit and values of democracy taking shape in the country. The Federal Government of Somalia is determined to ensure a smooth, peaceful, inclusive and enhanced electoral process for a peaceful democratic transition in November.

We are also championing a 30 per cent quota for women in Parliament, as their representation and political participation is central to our national progress. Those actions most certainly constitute the first step towards the implementation of the 2020 political road map for universal suffrage in Somalia and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. In Somalia we are not short of ambition or self-confidence. We are committed to achieving our State-building goals with equity and good governance as a crucial baseline. We are also determined to leave no one behind in our march forward towards a better tomorrow.

I am sure that everyone appreciates the difficulties of transitioning from conflict to inclusive governance and development. The Somali people and the Government are endeavouring to accomplish in just four years the kind of national transformation that took decades or centuries for many countries. Despite the enormity of the tasks ahead, we are committed and determined to succeed in achieving progress and prosperity for our people, the region and the world in general.

Turning to economic development, the Federal Republic of Somalia fully acknowledges that achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, to which we committed last year at the General Assembly, is central to our overall progress. Realistically achieving at least some of the Goals quickly and effectively, with a view to achieving the rest over the longer term, will ensure the success of our overall national and regional agenda for peace, sustainable development and prosperity. To that end, we have developed an inclusive, people-centred and implementable national development plan, which will act as a blueprint for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals within the set time frame.

Throughout the United Nations, many key discussions have focused on funding development priorities across the world, especially the Sustainable Development Goals. In Somalia we fully understand and appreciate that the traditional aid model alone cannot ensure development and that it must be complemented by national contributions. In that spirit, and with the attainment of progress and prosperity for our people and region as a key driver, we have made investment promotion a central focus of Somali foreign and economic policy.

Somalia is truly a rich nation, with the longest coast in Africa. Seventy per cent of its population is under 30 years of age. Our Government has passed one of the most competitive investment laws in the world, and we are ready to welcome and directly support all investors in each and every sector. In green energy, agriculture, infrastructure, telecommunications and the blue economy, Somalia can become a world leader and a profitable home for investors and new enterprises, with easy access to the African, Middle Eastern and Far Eastern markets. When the goal of investment is realized, most of the issues that we face in connection with illegal migration, large movements of refugees and poverty will be overcome in Somalia.

Relying on partnerships and the great efforts of all, especially the Somali people themselves, Somalia has turned the corner toward stability and progress. Today shops are open, schools are full and our markets are busy with traders and customers. More important, our diaspora is returning to invest and build our key institutions, and we thank those Governments and organizations that have encouraged and continue to actively encourage such activities. In the past year alone, Somalia achieved many milestones. We most recently hosted the historic Extraordinary Summit of

Intergovernmental Authority on Development Heads of State and Government in Mogadishu. We also successfully undertook our first national secondary school exams since the civil war — with the highest score received by a bright young lady. We are positively contributing to the stability, progress and development of our region, continent and the world through partnerships.

Through diverse partnerships, we are also working on getting Somali refugees to return home from Kenya voluntarily and with dignity so that they can actively participate in the efforts to rebuild their nation. Somalia, more than any other nation today, recognizes the importance of peacebuilding, which will help to avert the international refugee crisis. We appreciate the valuable contribution that refugees make to their new and old homes through remittances and cultural education, which is crucial for promoting tolerance. We are determined to save vulnerable lives at sea and reverse the brain drain holding our national progress hostage by striving to create at home the very opportunities that our people seek abroad.

It is impossible to forget the difficult past, but it is absolutely possible and necessary to dedicate oneself and the nation to a better future. That is what we are going to do in Somalia. In that regard, hope, confidence and progress characterize the new Somalia and all its people. There is no turning back now; we can only go forward together and in partnership with the region and the rest of the world. As we take the significant and necessary steps to confront the biggest challenges of our time as a community of nations, such as terrorism, poverty and large movements of refugees and migrants, we can assure everyone that Somalia and its people will play their part in the solutions.

The Acting President. I now call on His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Asim, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Maldives.

Mr. Asim (Maldives): I wish to begin by congratulating the President on his assumption of office. The Maldives is proud to welcome a distinguished diplomat from a fellow island State to preside over the General Assembly at its seventy-first session.

I also wish to congratulate Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for all of his hard work over the past 10 years, and especially for his efforts on climate-change advocacy and sustainable development and his partnership with

small island developing States (SIDS). He is certainly leaving a legacy of enormous historical significance.

Rarely do we get an opportunity to come together — the whole world — for a moment of collective agreement. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was such a moment. It is an Agenda of hope, a blueprint for advancing humankind, a plan for empowering the impoverished and a promise to future generations. The Agenda recognizes at its core that all efforts to achieve development should be holistic and that poverty is multidimensional. It recognizes that differentiated responses are necessary, even if aspirations are universal. It recognizes that development efforts should include everyone and address everyone.

President Abdullah Yameen Abdul Gayoom's development efforts aim to empower everyone so that all of society can share in the development dividends. We have reached our current situation through sustained, continuous, and targeted investment in health and education.

We find that the best way to sustain our developmental gains is to focus on our people. That is why we have made it our aim to deliver easily accessible health care to every citizen — a feat that is extremely challenging for a population of 338,000 people dispersed over 188 islands. It is why we have ensured free health care, provided sea ambulances on all 20 atolls and established a pharmacy on every inhabited island. It is why we have not stopped investing in education, despite achieving nearly 100 per cent literacy. Rather, we have continued to invest in teacher quality, while continuously improving and updating our curriculums and our approach. It is why we aim to provide affordable social housing, especially to all vulnerable groups of our society. In that connection, we aim to empower people with disabilities through financial and material support, such as the provision of housing for those with disabilities. That is also why we have chosen to focus on youth — improving their lives, their livelihood opportunities and their aspirations.

Investing in our people will put us on the right path. No investment has higher returns than investments in women and girls. Empowering women and girls to make their own choices and to determine the destiny of their choosing is not only the moral, responsible and correct choice to make; it is the smart decision to make. Women constitute half of our population. They can,

and should, contribute to our economy; they can, and should, contribute to our society.

Women in the Maldives have had the right to vote since our first Constitution, in 1932. Women in the Maldives have always been in our offices, in our politics and in our society. They have always had equal pay and equal rights, which is now enshrined in our Constitution. Today a woman in the Maldives can also go to a court of law and use the newly adopted Gender Equality Act to claim those rights. They can challenge cases involving gender inequality, sexual harassment and sexual abuse with specifically defined laws to back them up. We still have a long way to go — every country does — but we believe that we are on the right track to making institutional and structural changes that will bring about lasting and sustainable normative change.

A much-celebrated feature of the 2030 Agenda is its universality. The Goals and targets apply to all nations; they have been adopted by everyone. Yet embedded in those common responsibilities is the reality of special circumstances. Maldives is a small island developing State — a status that we cannot graduate from. Our islands are uniquely susceptible to economic, environmental and institutional shocks because we are so dependent on the rest of the world. Measures of development that are used to rank countries continue to ignore that reality. Development status continues to be determined on the basis of gross domestic product per capita. That system disadvantages smaller countries with small populations. To escape the "island paradox," we need the international community to re-evaluate how development is assessed. There needs to be a concerted effort to integrate the economic vulnerability of countries into such assessments. Without such a re-evaluation, our approach to development will never be holistic.

The fact that we have graduated from least-developed-country status does not mean that we have overcome our challenges. Large-scale infrastructure — ports, airports, hospitals, harbours — is still required across the entire Maldives. Yet the large-scale financing needed for those projects is not readily available because the preferential and concessional arrangements for financing were lost after we graduated from least-developed-country status. Those limitations make it harder to maintain and sustain the development gains that enabled us to graduate in the first place.

The Maldives is one of the countries that is most vulnerable to environmental shocks and one of the most exposed to the impacts of climate change. Climate change is an existential threat to our country. It has the potential to erode decades of development gains. For decades, we have been advocating urgent action on climate change and asking the world to take notice. As a lone voice in a sea of sceptics, we were not necessarily heard. But today, together with the 43 members of the Alliance of Small Island States, we can have a greater impact. With 13 other SIDS, we, the Maldives, were among the first ratifiers of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. We know that our emissions are almost negligible. But we want the international community to know that, small though we may be, we are making the choice to take action, and to take action now. We want the international community to continue to invest in action to prevent climate change and in forging meaningful partnerships. Investing today is saving tomorrow.

While we continue to be alarmed by the realities of climate change, another crisis looms. That is the state of our oceans. As a large-ocean State, our major economic activities depend on the health and wealth of the oceans. We are concerned about them. As in many situations, the issue at hand is one that needs a collective response. One such opportunity is the United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14, on the sustainable use of the oceans, which is to be held in June 2017. It will provide an opportunity for the international community to come together with renewed hope to find solutions that can get the results we desire.

An overarching and cross-cutting theme across all the agendas is investment — investing in our people, investing in our economies and investing in our environment. Above all, investment in our institutions is of the utmost importance. In order to implement ambitious agendas, our institutions and governance structures need to be sufficient and capable of delivering the results we want. The Maldives has been arguing for some time now that, unless small States are able to build strong institutions, they will not be able to build resilience in the spheres of economy and climate change.

We began the process of democratization only a decade ago. Informed by events and based on lessons learned, our institutions are adapting and changing. Institutions need space to form on their own. They need

to develop organically and to evolve with the needs and priorities of our society. While a healthy amount of scrutiny is necessary and welcome, institutions cannot build resilience under a constant microscope. However, the Maldives will remain engaged with the international community.

Today we have accepted that economic advancement goes hand in hand with social development and environmental protection. I hope that we have all accepted the fact that development needs to be holistic and that problems and solutions have interlinked consequences. The massive shift seen in provisions of the 2030 Agenda reflects precisely that reality, that all issues are interlinked.

It is in that vein that we have accepted that there can be no sustainable development without peace, and no peace without sustainable development. And nowhere is that more apparent than in Palestine. Cycles of violence and hatred perpetuated by the occupying Power, Israel, have led nowhere. A two-State solution that offers peace, stability and security is the only solution. Guaranteeing Palestinians the right to self-determination and sovereignty over their own land and natural resources is the only way out of the conflict.

A military solution is never the answer. Look at the condition of Syria. Thousands of innocent children, men and women have lost their lives to the conflict. Hundreds more are fleeing for their lives, only to be turned away by the politics of fear. Fences and wires do not stop violence; compassion and tolerance do. The rising tide of hatred, Islamophobia and xenophobia in the name of security will lead only to more violence, as more people feel more marginalized and more people find more reasons for hatred. And radical elements of society find much to feed on in poverty, misery and victimization.

We live in a world marred by extreme acts carried out in the name of religion and extremist beliefs, which instil fear in others. That is our reality. The Maldives condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. We reject radicalism. We especially denounce all acts of violence carried out in the name of Islam, for they are not only un-Islamic but anti-Islamic. We have passed legislation to address foreign terrorist fighters. We have established the National Counter-Terrorism Centre. And next month, we will also host an international seminar on counter-terrorism and counter-radicalization.

The United Nations is still the best-placed Organization to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The knowledge, practices and power of convening that the United Nations draws on are unmatched. Yet there is a recurring concern that we hear — a concern that we ourselves have voiced — namely, the need to increase representation in the main bodies of the United Nations. Small States such as the Maldives are often underrepresented, because our delegations are small and our capabilities are stretched. Every Member of the Organization must have an opportunity to serve and have an equal chance to be part of every body, especially the Security Council, in order to help make decisions that affect us all. We do not believe that might or size should determine destiny. Our ability, our motivation, our will to work and our ideas are more appropriate criteria.

For the first time since it joined the Organization, 51 years ago, the Maldives has boldly put forward its candidature to the Security Council for the 2019-2020 term. That is because we believe that the opportunity should be available to all and because we believe that we can serve. We believe that intent, resolve, fairness and the principle of representation must decide such opportunities.

In an ever-changing world, that which defines success for countries is the ability to adapt according to changing needs. The resilience of countries, continued investment and continuous will to work are critical. As a small island State, we face myriad challenges and vulnerabilities. But today we ask Members to value us because of our abilities, not our vulnerabilities. Evaluate our progress relatively, not against inapt benchmarks. We may be small, but we surely can be significant.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Lyonpo Damcho Dorji, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Bhutan.

Mr. Dorji (Bhutan): At the outset, I have the honour to convey the warm greetings of His Majesty the King and the people of Bhutan. I congratulate the President on his election as President of the General Assembly at its seventy-first session and assure him of my delegation's full support in the discharge of his responsibilities. His distinguished predecessor, Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, deserves our special appreciation for the excellent manner with which he steered the work of the seventieth session.

We meet at a time defined by breakthrough agreements. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing for development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change stand as testimonies to our collective resolve to advance peace, security, human rights and sustainable development. Those agreements underscore our commitment to multilateralism and serve as a reaffirmation of our faith in the purposes and principles of the United Nations. Together they present a historic opportunity to secure the collective hopes and aspirations of humankind.

We have undoubtedly made a good start on that monumental journey. However, let us be clear that many serious global challenges persist. We continue to witness wanton acts of terrorism and protracted conflicts that undermine the security, well-being and human rights of millions of people. Terrorism is the most flagrant violation of human rights, and we strongly condemn terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. It afflicts many nations and peoples, and the imperative to redouble international cooperation to combat that scourge is vital and urgent. Over the past five years, at least 15 major conflicts have erupted around the world.

Mr. El Haycen (Mauritania), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Today we are witnesses to the largest displacement of people fleeing violence and conflict since the founding of the United Nations. The value of the arms trade and global military expenditures has exceeded Cold-War levels. The current stockpile of nuclear weapons is enough to destroy our planet hundreds of times over. That unimaginable destructive power still looms as a grave threat. All of those facts serve as an acute reminder that our quest for peace and security remains unfulfilled.

On the development front, significant gaps and challenges to successfully achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) confront us. For instance, the Secretary General's June 2016 report to the Economic and Social Council on the SDGs highlights (E/2016/75) that one in eight people suffers from the abject despair of extreme poverty. About 800 million people suffer from hunger. More than 2 billion are affected by water scarcity. And 1.1 billion people live without electricity. Thousands of children die every day, mainly from preventable causes. Children make up nearly half of the almost 900 million people living on

less than \$1.90 per day. About 124 million children do not attend school, and two out of five leave primary school without basic skills.

Much remains to be done to accelerate the rate of progress in achieving gender parity and promoting the rights of women. We need to make concerted efforts to close the economic gap between men and women. Likewise, glaring inequalities within and among nations persist, despite substantial gains in global economic output. And addressing the employment challenge remains a daunting and complex task.

The risk of catastrophic climate change is no longer an abstract and long-term threat. Climate change is real, and countries in special situations, such as the least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and small island developing States (SIDS), are the most vulnerable. We have all experienced the impact of climate change, which is devastating and destabilizing, as can be seen from the frequency and intensity of recent weather events. In July we in Bhutan suffered extensive destruction and damage to property and infrastructure caused by unprecedented flash floods. Even as we deal with those long-standing challenges, the digital revolution, while opening new frontiers of opportunity by spurring global integration and catalysing a fourth industrial revolution, is ushering in new and interlocking challenges that have social, political, economic and security implications that we have yet to fully comprehend.

We have to move past the euphoria of landmark agreements. Now more than ever before, we must find new political resolve for urgent, focused and comprehensive action that involves all stakeholders at the national, regional and international levels — action that translates agreements into real and meaningful dividends for all peoples and all countries.

The scale, scope and complexity involved in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda should not be underestimated, especially given the time frame of fewer than 15 years. The focus now and in the years ahead must be on implementation. The principles and objectives of the 2030 Agenda are consistent with Bhutan's national development framework based on concept of Gross National Happiness. Guided by that timeless vision propounded by our kings, we have always ensured that peace, happiness and the well-being of our people remained at the core of all our endeavours. Formerly a closed subsistence economy

with no electricity or roads, Bhutan today is a rapidly emerging economy that aspires to achieve holistic development. With the accelerated development of our hydropower sector, the next 15 years are expected to usher in even greater transformation.

Bhutan has successfully aligned the SDGs with our national priorities and integrated them into our development-planning framework. The next decade will be critical as we seek to consolidate development gains and work towards realizing our national development goals of eradicating poverty, promoting inclusive and sustained economic growth, achieving self-reliance and eventually graduating from the least-developed-country category. We will continue to work in earnest to ensure the effective implementation of the SDGs, so that we succeed in achieving the transformation that we all seek. That is particularly important, as Bhutan faces immense challenges as an LDC and as a landlocked country. In that endeavour, the role of our development partners is critical.

The effectiveness of national strategies and investment plans, in both the formulation and the implementation, depends on predictable commitments of financial, technical and policy support measures from development partners. Our partners' emphasis needs to shift from the expression of approximate broad support measures for the benefit of LDCs as a group to what is necessary at the country level. Financing for development, particularly commitments to official development assistance, must be disaggregated at the country level, so that they can be expressed in national budgets aimed at financing short-, medium- and long-term investment plans. Without such predictability, it is impossible for LDCs to formulate the integrated and effective strategies and plans needed to achieve the SDGs. In that regard, allow me to share some of our experiences, so as to illustrate how the predictability of financing allows for more ambitious plans.

In 1992, we established the Bhutan Trust Fund for Environmental Conservation — the world's first environmental trust fund — to protect our pristine environment and rich biodiversity through the implementation of conservation programmes. Similarly, in 1998, we established the Health Trust Fund, which today sustainably finances the essential drug needs that are fundamental to our free health-care system. Recently, in collaboration with the World Wildlife Fund, we launched the Bhutan for Life Project, an innovative financing initiative based on a project-financing-

for-permanence model. Funds generated through the project will be used to maintain and manage Bhutan's protected areas, parks and biological corridors in perpetuity, as well as to promote sustainable livelihoods for the communities in the area. We hope to expand that innovative financing model with development partners to cover other critical sectors such as sustainable energy, education and infrastructure development.

The success of the 2030 Agenda will ultimately hinge on the quality of partnerships involving Governments, the private sector and civil society at the national, regional and global levels. Partnerships in innovative financing for development will be vital for groups of countries in special situations, namely, the LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS. We look forward to the continued support of our development partners and well-wishers.

Bhutan's commitment and contributions to the conservation and preservation of the environment, the protection of biodiversity and the mitigation of climate change have been widely acknowledged. That commitment dates back more than two decades, when we took a deliberate decision to shift our forest policy away from revenue generation towards environmental protection by banning the export of raw timber, despite our limited resources. Furthermore, in 2008, we pledged to safeguard our forests through a constitutional mandate that requires maintaining a minimum of 60 per cent of our land under forest cover in perpetuity. Today, 75 per cent of our land is covered in forest, and 38 per cent of our total land area has been designated as national protected areas. In 2009, we committed to remaining carbon neutral, but in reality we are carbon negative, and we look forward to ratifying the Paris Agreement on Climate Change upon completion of internal processes.

Effective multilateralism requires an effective United Nations — one that is fit for the purpose. Since the founding of the United Nations, the world has undergone profound changes. Its membership has increased fourfold, and the challenges we face have become more complex. Institutions cannot be static. They must evolve and adapt, so as to remain relevant and effective. The United Nations and its principal organs must be reformed in keeping with contemporary realities — in particular the Security Council, so as to make the Council more representative, transparent and accountable and to enhance its legitimacy and credibility. Similarly, the 2030 Agenda requires a

United Nations development system that is able to deliver integrated and coordinated policy support. In that regard, it is essential to achieve an ambitious outcome to the new quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system — one that matches the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda.

Bhutan has been blessed with peace, progress and stability under the enlightened leadership of our monarchs. We embraced democracy in a unique manner, as it was imposed on us by our kings and not born out of popular unrest or strife. I am pleased to state that our transition to democracy is on a firm footing, with democratic institutions in place, supported by a vibrant and independent media.

Peace and security is a shared concern and responsibility. Bhutan is committed to supporting United Nations peacekeeping endeavours to maintain peace, protect civilians and create the conditions necessary for lasting and durable solutions to conflicts around the world. Despite our limitations and constraints, we joined the fraternity of troop- and police-contributing countries in 2014. That is a reflection of our commitment to share the burden along with other Member States. Today, we have a presence in 10 peacekeeping missions, and we hope to broaden and deepen our peacekeeping engagement in the coming years.

As Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon completes his tenure in December, I wish to take this opportunity to express my profound gratitude and appreciation to him for his leadership, service and contributions to the important work of the United Nations. We wish him and his family every success in all their future endeavours.

Second chances are rare in life. The agreements that we adopted in 2015 have given us an extraordinary opportunity to bring about greater peace, progress and prosperity for all. History will judge us by our ability to translate those compacts into meaningful and concrete results. Let us not squander this historic opportunity.

Addressing our peace, security and sustainable development challenges requires global action, underpinned by the solidarity of all Member States and bound together by a strong esprit de corps at the United Nations. In that context, I would like to end with a quote by His Majesty the King of Bhutan:

"Individual or even national success is a ship that cannot carry everyone together to the same place at the same time. Rich nations must stop and be mindful of the poorer ones left behind. Successful people must stop and remember those who did not make it. No nation today can stand alone in achievement. Time is slowly telling us that there can be no lasting individual success without success as a community, and there cannot be lasting national progress and success if it does not fit into a future of global peace, harmony and equality. The world must progress together or fail together."

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Elvin Nimrod, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Legal Affairs, Carriacou and Petite Martinique Affairs and Local Government of Grenada.

Mr. Nimrod (Grenada): I am pleased to extend the usual warm greetings from the Government and the people of Grenada, on whose behalf I am privileged to address the General Assembly and its members. I am also pleased to join colleagues who spoke before me in thanking the President of the General Assembly at its seventieth session, Mr. Mogens Lykketoft of Denmark, for his energetic and focused leadership. I commend Mr. Lykketoft for so diligently charting the course towards transforming our world through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

I must also congratulate and thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his extraordinary leadership of the United Nations, and express our deep gratitude, especially for the keen interest he has shown in addressing the developmental challenges facing small island developing States. I also wish to assure the incoming President, Ambassador Peter Thomson of Fiji, of my delegation's full cooperation and support as he encourages cooperation under this session's theme: that is, "The Sustainable Development Goals: a universal push to transform our world".

Allow me to use this rostrum to recognize the contribution of a gigantic Grenadian personality who passed away this week — Sir Lamuel Stanislaus, who served Grenada, the region and the Organization with distinction and honour for over a decade as Grenada's Permanent Representative to the United Nations and one year as Vice-President of the General Assembly. Sir Lamuel was the embodiment of diplomacy and statesmanship. His contributions transcend nationality, geography and subject matter. His was an eloquent

and convincing voice in this Hall, addressing issues on behalf of his country and his region. May his soul rest in peace. I believe it is ironic that that very noble gentleman was buried today, the same day in which Grenada addresses the Assembly.

Grenada unwaveringly recommitments to the United Nations and its principles, as outlined in the Charter. Our commitment to the norms of peace, equality, justice, human rights and multilateralism is clear. At home, Grenada continues to embrace opportunities to consolidate democratic values and practices in civic life. I am proud to inform the Assembly that on 27 October, Grenadians' voices will be heard on the matter of broad constitutional reform.

I hail from the tiny island of Carriacou, which, together with Petite Martinique, forms my constituency and part of mainland Grenada, and makes up our tri-island State. One of the possible results of the upcoming referendum could be a change in the name of the State so as to better represent the collective identity of our nation.

The reforms also include amendments to the Bill of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, which would guarantee access to public education to every Grenadian child up to 16 years of age, and would further ensure that children with disabilities are afforded public education tailored to their specific needs up to age 18.

Grenada is committed to Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which speaks to gender equality and discrimination against women and girls. The reforms also call on the State to ensure that men and women enjoy equal rights and status in all spheres of life, especially in economic, educational, political, civic and social activities; that women are not discriminated against by reason of marital status, pregnancy or any other gender-based attribute; and that Parliament can enact suitable laws to correct disparities and inequalities between men and women.

We live in a world that is plagued with many challenges: civil wars, famine, droughts, floods, the impacts of climate change, humanitarian and economic crises, and terrorism. But we also built the United Nations for the express purpose of addressing such challenges. The United Nations was built to steer us away from anarchy and perpetual antagonism.

With the 17 Sustainable Development Goals we have created a new pathway to achieve a more equitable

and lasting brand of development. That pathway is paved with clean energy, universal access to education, affordable health care, food security, clean water and air, and gender and racial equality. History has shown that development is tenuous whenever human rights and the environment are not prioritized. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals are the product of deep reflection and learning, and the realization that development without human rights and environmental considerations is unreliable.

Despite the remarkable progress made on each of the Millennium Development Goals, the fact that at least \$2.5 trillion will be needed each year for the SDGs signals the size of the gap that remains to be addressed.

Grenada is resolute in its commitment to Sustainable Development Goal 14, on the conservation and promotion of the sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources. Earlier this year, Grenada hosted Blue Week 2016. That conference was held in collaboration and partnership with the Governments of the Netherlands and Indonesia and with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Bank, the Global Forum on Oceans, Coasts and Islands, the Clinton Climate Initiative, the Caribbean Challenge Initiative and The Nature Conservancy. At that event, we employed the innovative and popular "shark-tank" approach, which allowed local and international ocean entrepreneurs to pitch project ideas for funding. The rationale was that we cannot continue to merely talk about problems at ocean conferences; we need to facilitate solutions and commitments for the sustainable development and use of our oceans.

The ocean economy is a very important starting point for thinking about conservation. The natural capital of the ocean is like the principal deposited in an interest-bearing bank account. Unfortunately, instead of living off the interest, we have been drawing down from the principal.

The work done by World Wide Fund for Nature International and the Boston Consulting Group on the Ocean Economy has described the estimated \$24 trillion asset value of the oceans, which generates some \$2.5 trillion per year. The need to preserve that natural capital is self evident. But when we consider data provided by the World Bank and FAO, we see that the world is losing \$83 billion per year from unsustainable fisheries practices. Nine Caribbean nations have committed to conserving and managing

20 per cent of their marine and coastal environments by 2020. I am pleased to note that Grenada has committed to conserving 25 per cent of its coastal area and marine resources by 2020. Both of those commitments are well above target 5 of Goal 14 of the SDGs, which calls for 10 per cent conservation by 2020.

Small island nations in the Caribbean and the Pacific must be lead advocates for oceans and climate change. Most of us have more space in the sea than we do on land. In Grenada, for instance, our maritime territory is 75 times our land mass. The ratios are even higher for other archipelagoes. That is why Grenada is pleased to play a leading role, not only in the Blue Network, but also in the Blue Guardians, facilitated by the Clinton Foundation and the Global Island Partnership initiatives for islands. We invite other countries to partner with us and participate in both.

Grenada is also helping the Blue Network create an online database and platform for ocean-related projects seeking funding. That initiative, called BluNet, will be showcased at Oceans Day during the twenty-second Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to be held in November this year in Marrakesh, Morocco.

Financing difficulties and our small size severely affect our ability to invest in renewable energy projects. Today Grenada calls on Member States, especially the ones that possess the technology and technical capacity, to continue to work with small island developing States so as to increase their ability to harness existing renewable energy opportunities.

Grenada is almost 100 per cent reliant on imported fossil fuels for electricity generation. As a result, our development is held hostage to global price fluctuations and the high cost of electricity generation. We therefore call for easier access to the Green Climate Fund to support renewable energy projects in small island developing States.

In that regard, Grenada calls for a commitment from world leaders to deposit their instruments of ratification of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change by the end of 2016. We hope that the twenty-second session of the Conference of the Parties, which will be held in about six weeks, will build on the gains of the previous session and garner the necessary momentum to enable the full implementation of the Paris Agreement.

Grenada further calls upon the international community to work with Grenada and other small island developing States on innovative approaches to international climate financing, which would include catalysing private investment.

Like many small island developing States, we suffer from debt overhang, which limits the fiscal space needed to address climate challenge. While the International Monetary Fund has consistently expressed satisfaction with Grenada's response aimed at addressing the structural deficiencies that are both a symptom and a cause of that overhang, that response has, unfortunately, required a huge sacrifice on the part of our citizens, who are already suffering from climate change, fossil fuel dependence and the financial crisis. Those three problems compound one another and collectively limit our ability to invest in climate action that can actually alleviate all three issues, which has created a vicious circle.

Working with partners, Grenada will optimize various leadership platforms to create practical, concrete initiatives to turn that vicious circle into a virtuous one, where climate action can catalyse a wave of public and private investment that can alleviate all three problems. Such measures would help small States like Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique take action to combat climate change and its impacts in areas such as potable water supply, renewable energy and energy efficiency, climate-smart agriculture, climate-resilient homes and buildings and resilient coasts and oceans, to name a few. Those are the developments that our people are demanding, not for tomorrow but for today. When we observe the climate changes in our world today and their effects on humankind, we owe it to ourselves and succeeding generations to act with immediacy — we must act now.

As we attempt to transform our world, we are confronted with certain global financial policies and actions that pose significant threats to our region's sustainable development. Exclusion from correspondent banking services and de-risking, blacklisting and premature graduation to middle-income status are measures that negatively affect Caribbean economies. The unilateral and premature graduation of many small island developing States to middle-income status without consideration of our region's specific vulnerabilities has resulted in significant budgetary shortfalls, adversely affecting our economic and social development.

Our region has inherent structural economic challenges that already restrict the pace of our development. We ask that those impediments to growth be taken into account when our cases come up for consideration. Indeed, the current formula generalizes where generalizations should not be made. Outside of per capita gross domestic product (GDP), the intragroup differences among countries with middle-income status are astounding. Economists today admit that inequality had not been treated with any depth until very recently. Economists also readily admit that GDP is an imperfect measure of development.

The withdrawal of correspondent banking services from Caribbean Community member States can be seen as an economic assault that will destabilize the financial sector of our already vulnerable economies. For small economies like ours, the impact could be enormous. To give one example, the World Bank has indicated that more than 90 per cent of remittances are transferred through correspondent banking services. Remittances contribute in real and significant terms to the GDP of small nation-States. The World Bank goes on to state that a sudden stop in remittances in economies that rely on those flows could pose a significant threat to the socioeconomic stability of the region.

Grenada applauds the progress made in the recent rapprochement between Cuba and the United States. Grenada sees the peaceful resolution of some of the issues in those relations through dialogue as an example to be emulated between and among all States where violence, conflicts or disputes prevail. Grenada reiterates that it neither promulgates, applies nor condones laws or measures that encroach upon or undermine the sovereign rights of any State, nor laws that restrict or hinder international trade or navigation by any State. Consequently, we issue another clarion call for the total lifting of the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed on the Government and the people of Cuba by the United States of America.

As we forge ahead, it is important to bear in mind that poverty is multidimensional in nature and that its implications for our youth and women go beyond the concepts of income or consumption. The problems affecting our youth cannot be resolved only by addressing unemployment and poor working conditions we must also provide access to health care and decent opportunities. We must ensure that we are building the necessary skills and knowledge for that group to undertake economic activities, with an emphasis

on vocational training, entrepreneurial skills and innovation for our young people.

We recognize the importance of regional cooperation and international partnerships in addressing the scourge of non-communicable diseases. We are adopting a holistic approach by utilizing the United Nations system, the World Health Organization and the Pan American Health Organization to provide a basis for the health agenda and to guide us forward. Of particular importance is assistance in addressing our capacity constraints, facilitating knowledge-sharing and allowing the use of innovative approaches that could be adapted to the needs of our country. President Obama, in his address to the Assembly a few days ago (see A/71/PV.8), reiterated that the health issues that we currently face respected no walls or boundaries. Let us therefore pool our collective energy and resources to build capacity to rid humankind of those scourges.

Grenada continues its clarion call for a negotiated two-State settlement between Israel and Palestine. No matter what road is taken, the end result must enable the full economic, social, political and religious self-determination of the Palestinian people. Grenada recognizes the struggles of the Palestinian people and beseeches the international community to reject mere political pragmatism and the status quo while generations are being lost.

The United Nations membership must make Article 1, paragraph 3, of the Charter of the United Nations a major priority in the next few years. Our founding fathers called for the Organization to

"achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion".

We must do everything in our power to provide additional economic opportunities for the developing world. I therefore call on the Economic and Social Council to actively pursue efforts to create an environment that enables Member States to raise the standard of living of their peoples. In our current global context, we must be conscious that inclusion in the global economy is vital.

Finally, I must recall Article 1, paragraph 1, of the Charter, which calls for the Organization to

"maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace".

We must be relentless in our pursuit of the aims of the Organization. Our challenge is to work towards the elimination of terrorism, terrorist activities and armed conflicts around the world. Our quest must be to create economic opportunities for all States. And our goal should be the peaceful coexistence of all peoples of the international community. Indeed, if we can achieve that, we will be well on our way to transforming our world.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Isselkou Ould Ahmed Izid Bih, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania.

Mr. Bih (Mauritania) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is a great honour for me to begin by congratulating Mr. Peter Thomson on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its seventy-first session. I wish him every success in the noble task that has been conferred upon him. I would like to express our gratitude to Mr. Mogens Lykketoft for all the hard work he undertook during his presidency at the seventieth session of the General Assembly.

I also wish to take this opportunity to underscore the tireless work undertaken by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in the service of peace and security. His skills, leadership and ability to keep a close eye on the major problems facing our planet and to react accordingly have enabled us to foster a spirit of tolerance, mutual understanding and cooperation at the international level.

Mauritania, under President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, is playing a crucial role in the maintenance of peace and security in the Sahel and Sahara regions through an approach based on openness, dialogue and professionalism. Despite a complex regional backdrop, our efforts have been successful, in particular in the fight against several terrorist groups and organizations, following lengthy struggles throughout 2010 and 2011.

Experts agree nonetheless that Mauritania represents an exception in terms of its success in fighting terrorism and extremist violence. Having managed to quash these effectively since 2011, we have also reinforced our security and defence capabilities without undermining individual or collective liberties and freedoms. We have continued to focus our full

attention on sustainable development and the needs of those who are most vulnerable within society.

According to Reporters Without Borders, Mauritania has been ranked first among all Arab nations in terms of freedom of expression and freedom of the press for three years now. Furthermore, according to a recent United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report, Mauritania is the leading country in the subregion in the UNDP Human Development Index. We have succeeded in guaranteeing and ensuring freedom of expression and the right to protest, demonstrate and assemble, meaning that we escaped unscathed from the so-called Arab Spring, which afflicted so many of our Arab brothers.

We have maintained open channels of dialogue between the majority Government and the opposition since the elections in 2011. That has allowed us to undertake profound regulatory and legislative reforms, particularly regarding the empowerment of Mauritanian women and the strengthening of the values of citizenship, respect for others and social harmony.

It is our belief that security and development are intrinsically linked, which is why we have adopted a very robust policy to tackle corruption, particularly with regard to public expenditure and procurement. We have also set in motion a series of initiatives to root out corruption in the private sector. That has allowed us to raise the necessary funds to increase our security and also create youth employment opportunities. That rational and judicious policy has led to unprecedented progress and development in many economic sectors. Infrastructure, roads, ports, hospitals and universities have undergone major construction programmes, and there have been improvements in electricity production thanks to our use of both traditional and renewable energy resources. We have also increased the number of homes with direct access to safe drinking water, particularly for families that have been living in shanty towns for more than 50 years.

Mauritania straddles the Arab Maghreb world and the Saharan world, with a long Atlantic coastline on one border and the Sahara desert on another. Because of our geographical location, we are a key player in the security and economic panorama of West Africa. It is our desire to create harmony and understanding between the subregions to which we belong — the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa — through a policy of good neighbourliness. We have adopted a neutral

policy by way of response to the various conflicts in our region and with regard to the conflict in Western Sahara. It has always been our desire to remain neutral and support the efforts of the United Nations to find a permanent solution to the Western Sahara conflict. It is a conflict that is holding back integration and development in our region, and there is an urgent need to solve it.

Our credibility on a continental level was reflected during our presidency of the African Union in 2014. We also presided over the African Union Peace and Security Council in 2014, when we led and participated in many initiatives, especially in seeking to resolve the crises in Côte d'Ivoire, Libya, Mali and Burundi, to name but a few places. I am sure the Assembly recalls the courageous act of our President himself when he landed in Kidal, Mali, in a helicopter in 2014 during a period when the town was ravaged by conflict. Such a courageous act paved the way to the renewal of direct negotiations between the parties to the conflict. Furthermore, Mauritania is home to more than 60,000 Malian refugees in the Mbera camp in the east of the country.

Despite our scarcity of material and human resources as well as of natural resources, and notwithstanding the sensitivity of our geopolitical situation, we have contributed to many peacekeeping operations upon the request of the United Nations. We have deployed contingents in Côte d'Ivoire and the Central African Republic, and the leaders of those missions have all spoken warmly of the professionalism and ethical behaviour of the Mauritanian troops. Furthermore, police contingents from Mauritania are currently deployed in the Central African Republic, a presence requested and approved by the United Nations.

Mauritania took the lead in organizing the Group of Five for the Sahel, with Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali and Mauritania as members, and we are honoured to currently occupy the post of Secretary-General of the Group. It is our responsibility to coordinate the actions of these five countries in matters of security and good governance, while focusing in particular on the needs of the most remote and least populated areas. We have developed various programmes and initiatives, which have drawn the favourable attention of our international partners.

Mauritania warmly welcomed the opportunity to host the latest Arab Summit. Despite the short notice

and the complex set of circumstances currently faced by the Arab region, we were nonetheless glad to take on that responsibility. We are convinced that, whatever the differences may be among our countries, each Arab Summit provides a valuable opportunity to bring about reconciliation between our countries and to brainstorm about our present and our future together. This very well-organized Summit produced some excellent resolutions, and we believe it sent a strong message, received in many countries, to all who seek to hold Arab brotherhood responsible for the propagation of unacceptable messages and for wreaking havoc.

We feel that we bear responsibility towards the greater Arab nation. That is why we attach a great deal of importance to the rights of the Palestinian people and their right to enjoy dignity and sovereignty as a State. The Palestinians have a right to an independent State with East Jerusalem as its capital. It is our belief that the ongoing violations of human rights in Palestine and in other Arab territories occupied by Israel serve only to increase instability and further provoke the spread of violent extremism and terrorism throughout the world.

We would like to address all the parties to the bloody conflicts in countries such as Yemen, Libya and Syria, our brother Arab nations. We ask them to choose the path of wisdom with the best interests of their people at heart. We live in a global village where it is no longer possible to end conflict by military means, however strong an army might be.

The principle of the judicial immunity of States is a cornerstone of our international system, yet terrorism and violent extremism, together with drug trafficking, pose major challenges to international peace, security and order. Hence, States must develop synergies and join forces to tackle those challenges and overcome them together. Any national legislation that runs counter to international law, particularly as concerns the judicial immunity of States, will undermine the efforts by the international community to tackle the aforementioned scourges.

Climate change is also a major threat to sustainable development, particularly in the regions of the Sahel and the Sahara. Mauritania, as is the case for many countries in the subregion, must face that problem squarely. Since the desert sands of the Sahara cover much of our country's surface, environmental issues must necessarily cut across all aspects of our national policies, particularly those relating to economic development, if we are to

pursue sustainable development. We have been able to limit the phenomenon of desertification. Thanks to our efforts and to the sponsorship of the President of the Republic of Mauritania, we have engaged in a tree-planting programme throughout the country to reverse the process of desertification. Our natural resources have also been included in an effective protection mechanism. Mauritania was chosen to host the Panafrican Agency of the Great Green Wall, an ambitious project of the African Union Commission that covers approximately 7,000 kilometres from west to east, linking the Atlantic coast with the Red Sea, in the fight against environmental degradation.

We have also been carefully protecting our fish stocks for future generations. We look favourably on the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and it is our cherished hope that all parties will respect their commitments under it.

Mauritania aspires to the full implementation of an inclusive and ambitious work plan for cities and urban spaces that will flesh out the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its 17 Goals and its 169 targets. The modernization of our cities and towns will provide decent living standards for inhabitants and will ensure that social inclusion is tailored to the requirements of each individual and each setting. It is important to ensure that social development planning meets the need for dignity and decent living standards in urban spaces. We hope that Habitat III, to be held in October in Quito, will be a success and fully reflect the aspirations and hopes of our people. Our desire is to be able to achieve a holistic and comprehensive solution that strikes a balance between urban and rural living conditions.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): We have heard the last speaker on the list of speakers in the general debate for this meeting.

I shall now call on those representatives who wish to speak in exercise of the right of reply. May I remind members that, in accordance with decision 34/401, statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first statement and to five minutes for the second, and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mrs. Özgür (Turkey): Turkey's position on Syria with regard to the political and humanitarian aspects was shared on the first day of the general debate with representatives at the highest political levels of United

Nations membership (see A/71/PV.8). I have nothing to add to that position. I wish to emphasize, however, our dismay at certain remarks in the statement delivered by the Syrian regime's representative (see A/71/PV.20). It included distorted facts and baseless accusations, including those regarding Turkey. We reject them in their entirety. We are confident that, eventually, those responsible for the destruction of Syria and the suffering of the Syrian people will be held accountable for their crimes. Until then, Turkey will stand by the democratic aspirations of the Syrian people.

Ms. Rakhmatia (Indonesia): Indonesia would like to exercise its right of reply to the statements delivered by the representatives of the Solomon Islands (see A/71/PV.18) and Vanuatu (see A/71/PV.19), and the similar statements by the representatives of Nauru (see A/71/PV.13), the Marshall Islands (see A/71/PV.15), Tuvalu (see A/71/PV.19) and Tonga (see A/71/PV.19), regarding matters concerning Papua, a province of Indonesia.

Indonesia is shocked to hear that, at this important stage, where leaders are gathered in the General Assembly to address the early implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, the transformation of our collective action, and other global challenges, such as climate change — whose severest impact is felt by Pacific countries — the State leaders chose instead to violate the Charter of the United Nations by interfering in another country's sovereign affairs and attempting to violate its territorial integrity.

We categorically reject the continuing insinuations in their statements, which clearly reflect an unfortunate lack of understanding of the history, current situation and progressive developments in Indonesia, including in the provinces of Papua and West Papua. Couched in unfriendly rhetoric and smacking of a political manoeuvre, those politically motivated statements were designed to support separatist groups in the State provinces, groups that have persistently engaged in inciting public disorder and in conducting armed terrorist attacks on civilians and security personnel.

The statements made by those countries clearly violate the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the principle of international law concerning friendly relations among States, as well as the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States. I reiterate that it is a violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States. It is highly regrettable and dangerous for States to misuse the United Nations,

including the Assembly. Those countries are using the Assembly to advance their domestic agenda and, in some cases, in an attempt to divert attention from political and social problems at home. Those countries mentioned are also using false and fabricated information as the basis for their statements. The conduct of those countries undermines the Charter of the United Nations and is detrimental to the credibility of the Assembly.

Indonesia's commitment to the protection of human rights is beyond question. Indonesia is a founding member of the Human Rights Council. Indonesia has already served as a member of the Council for three terms and is currently serving a fourth term. Indonesia initiated the Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. Indonesia has ratified eight out of nine core international human rights instruments, which have all been incorporated into its national legal system — compared with just four by the Solomon Islands and five by Vanuatu.

Indonesia is among the few countries that have an ongoing national plan of action on human rights: it is currently working with the fourth iteration of the plan, which is for the 2015-2019 period. Indonesia has had an active and robust National Commission on Human Rights since 1993, as well as a vibrant civil society and free media. Indonesia is a country with a full-fledged, functioning democracy. In such a vibrant national democracy, where there is the highest commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights at all levels, it would be nearly impossible for any human rights allegations to go unnoticed or unscrutinized.

We reaffirm that there are domestic mechanisms in place at the national level in Indonesia, as well as at the provincial level in Papua and West Papua. For our part, we will continue to maintain appropriate focus on the development of the Papua and West Papua provinces in the best interests of all.

Let me conclude with a saying from our Asia-Pacific region, namely, that when one points the index finger at others, the thumb automatically points to one's own face.

Mr. Li Yongsheng (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): With respect to the arbitration unilaterally initiated by the Philippines in the matter of the South China Sea and the ruling in favour of the Philippines, the Chinese

Government and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs have made statements and issued a position paper expressing the position of China very clearly. I would like to reiterate here that the ruling is null and void and has no binding force. China neither recognizes nor accepts it. China's territorial sovereignty, maritime rights and interests in the South China Sea shall under no circumstances be affected by that ruling. China opposes and will never accept any claim or action based on it.

The Chinese Government will continue to abide by international law and basic norms governing international relations as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, including the principles of respecting State sovereignty, territorial integrity and the peaceful settlement of disputes. To maintain peace and stability in the South China Sea, it will continue to work with the States directly concerned to resolve the relevant disputes in the South China Sea through negotiations and consultations, on the basis of respect for historical facts and in accordance with international law.

Mr. Baiten (Philippines): I wish to thank the representative of the People's Republic of China for his delegation's interest and attention with regard to the statement delivered earlier by the Secretary for Foreign Affairs of the Philippines, Mr. Perfecto Yasay. In further articulating my country's position, I will make a brief statement and will not exhaust my full 10 minutes.

We know the position and arguments expressed by the representative of China. As a fundamental point, may I state that China's position and arguments have been exhaustively discussed and addressed with finality in the award of the Arbitral Tribunal in the matter of the South China Sea Arbitration, rendered on 12 July 2016. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, to which the Philippines and China are States parties, provides that the award shall be final and shall be complied with by the parties. The Philippines, at the highest level, has announced its readiness to engage China in discussions to move forward on the resolution of the dispute. As a matter of fact, preliminary talks are now ongoing. At the same time, the Philippines, at the highest level, has announced that the award of the Arbitral Tribunal should be the starting point for the negotiation of the resolution.

To reiterate, this award is now a significant part of the corpus of jurisprudence in international law, in particular the law of the sea. It cannot be ignored, now or ever. It has clarified the maritime entitlements

of both the Philippines and China with respect to the South China Sea, together with the respective rights and obligations in accordance with those entitlements.

The Arbitral Tribunal had jurisdiction over the dispute. On 29 October 2015, the Arbitral Tribunal issued a unanimous award finding that it had jurisdiction, and that that jurisdiction applies to China, even if it chose not to participate in the proceedings. It also held that the decision by the Philippines to commence arbitration unilaterally was not an abuse of the dispute settlement provisions of the Convention. On 12 July 2016, the Arbitral Tribunal rendered its award and the merits. I will not take up the General Assembly's precious time in summarizing the award, for it should be well known to all Member States. Let me only mention the highlights.

First, the Tribunal ruled that China's claims to historic rights, or other sovereign rights or jurisdiction, with respect to the maritime areas of the South China Sea encompassed by the relevant part of the "nine-dash line" are contrary to the Convention and without lawful effect to the extent that they exceed the geographic and substantive limits of China's maritime entitlements under the Convention. The Convention supersedes any historic rights, or other sovereign rights or jurisdiction, in excess of the limits imposed therein. The Convention defines the scope of maritime entitlements in the South China Sea, which may not extend beyond the limits imposed therein.

Second, the Tribunal ruled on the status, under the Convention, of various maritime features in the South China Sea, ruling specifically that none of them is an island within the meaning of article 121 of the Convention. Not one of them — not Scarborough Shoal, which the Chinese call Huangyan Dao, Johnson Reef, Cuarteron Reef, Fiery Cross Reef, Gaven Reef (North), McKennan Reef, Mischief Reef nor Second Thomas Shoal — can sustain human habitation or economic life on their own and accordingly have no exclusive economic zone or continental shelf.

Third, the Tribunal found that Mischief Reef and Second Thomas Shoal lie within 200 nautical miles of the Philippines coast, off Palawan Island, and are located in an area that is not overlapped by the entitlements generated by any maritime feature claimed by China. Mischief Reef and Second Thomas Shoal form part of the exclusive economic zone and continental shelf of the Philippines. According to the Tribunal, they are rocks — all of them.

Fourth, the Tribunal ruled that China, through the construction of installations and artificial islands at Mischief Reef without the authorization of the Philippines, violated articles 60 and 80 of the Convention with respect to the Philippines' sovereign rights in its exclusive economic zone and continental shelf, and that, as a low-tide elevation, Mischief Reef is not capable of appropriation.

Fifth, the Tribunal ruled that China interfered with the Philippines sovereign rights in its exclusive economic zone and continental shelf through China's operation of its marine surveillance vessels in 2011, in violation of article 77 of the Convention, with respect to the Philippines' sovereign rights over the non-living resources of the continental shelf in the area of Reed Bank, and through China's promulgation of the moratorium in 2012 on fishing in the South China Sea, without exception for areas of the South China Sea falling within the exclusive economic zone of the Philippines and without limiting the moratorium to Chinese flagged vessels, in violation of article 56 of the Convention, with respect to the Philippines' sovereign rights over the living resources of its exclusive economic zone.

Sixth, the Tribunal ruled that China, through the operation of its marine surveillance vessels, tolerated and failed to exercise due diligence to prevent fishing by Chinese flagged vessels at Mischief Reef and Second Thomas Shoal in 2013, and therefore failed to exhibit due regard for the Philippines' sovereign rights with respect to fisheries in its exclusive economic zone, in violation of article 58, paragraph 3, of the Convention.

Seventh, the Tribunal ruled that China, through the operation of its official vessels at Scarborough Shoal from May 2012 onwards, unlawfully prevented Filipino fishermen from engaging in traditional fishing at Scarborough Shoal.

Eighth, the Tribunal ruled that China violated its obligation to protect and preserve the marine environment through its toleration and protection of, and failure to prevent, Chinese fishing vessels from engaging in harmful activities of harvesting endangered species at Scarborough Shoal, Second Thomas Shoal and other features in the Spratly Islands, in violation of articles 192 and 194, paragraph 5, of the Convention, and through its island-building activities at Cuarteron Reef, Fiery Cross Reef, Gaven Reef (North), Johnson Reef, Hughes Reef, Subi Reef and Mischief Reef, in violation

of articles 192, 194, paragraph 1, 194, paragraph 5, 197, 123 and 206 of the Convention.

The Tribunal found, based on compelling evidence, expert reports and a critical assessment of Chinese claims, that China's artificial-island-building activities on the seven reefs in the Spratly Islands have caused devastating and long-lasting damage to the marine environment. The Tribunal also found that China did not fulfil its duties under articles 205 and 206 of the Convention to cooperate or coordinate with the other States bordering the South China Sea and to deliver an environmental impact assessment of the activities to a competent international body.

Ninth, the Tribunal ruled that China, by virtue of the conduct of Chinese law enforcement vessels in the vicinity of Scarborough Shoal, created a serious risk of collision, endangered the Philippine vessels and personnel, and thus violated article 94 of the Convention as well as rules 2, 6, 7, 8, 15 and 16 of the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea, 1972.

Tenth, the Tribunal ruled that China, in the course of the arbitration proceedings, aggravated and extended the dispute between the parties through its dredging, artificial-island-building and construction activities in the exclusive economic zone and the continental shelf of the Philippines.

Mr. Li Yongsheng (China): The unilateral initiation of an arbitration proceeding by the Philippine's Government was done in bad faith. It aimed not to resolve the relevant disputes between China and the Philippines or to maintain peace and stability in the South China Sea, but to deny China's territorial sovereignty, maritime rights and interests in the South China Sea. The initiation of this arbitration proceeding violates international law. The conduct of the Arbitral Tribunal and its ruling seriously contravene the general practice of international arbitration; completely deviate from the object and purpose of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which is to promote the peaceful settlement of disputes; substantially impair the integrity and authority of UNCLOS; gravely infringe upon China's legitimate right as a sovereign State and a State party to UNCLOS; and are unjust and unlawful.

(spoke in Chinese)

At the moment, thanks to the concerted efforts of China and countries of the Association of Southeast

Asian Nations (ASEAN), the situation in the South China Sea is progressing in a positive direction. Regional countries are working to bring the South China Sea issue back on the right track of dialogue and consultation in a forward-looking spirit. China stands ready to work with ASEAN countries under regional arrangements, pursuant to the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, to properly handle disputes, enhance mutual trust, steer clear of disruptions and jointly maintain the peace and stability of the South China Sea.

Mr. Baiten (Philippines): In reply to the statement made by the representative of China, may I just say that the arbitration proceedings, which were initiated by the Philippines, were not the root cause of the destabilization in the South China Sea. The root cause was China's unilateral and aggressive actions on the ground that changed the status quo and imposed its "nine-dash line" on other countries and China's island-building and escalation of activities in the area. Those include the increased presence of military assets and the possibility of the further militarization of outposts in the South China Sea, which have eroded trust and confidence, increased tensions and undermined peace, security and stability in the region. That is the core issue. It has been recognized in documents of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) at the level of foreign ministers and ASEAN leaders. The arbitration is the effort of the Philippines to resolve the dispute on an equal footing and under the rule of law.

Secondly, the arbitration has not aggravated the disputes in the South China Sea. Arbitration is widely recognized as a peaceful means of solving disputes. As the Arbitral Tribunal found, it had jurisdiction. The ASEAN Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea does not limit the Philippines to bilateral negotiations exclusively, especially if such bilateral negotiations prove to be unfair and one-sided. But having said that, I reiterate that the Philippines is now fully engaged and ready to talk with China on the basis of the arbitral award.

Thirdly, the arbitration does not derail the work of ASEAN and China on a code of conduct. The joint communiqué cited earlier by the ASEAN leaders states that ASEAN has urged all parties to ensure the full and effective implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea and the expeditious conclusion of a code of conduct to build, maintain and enhance mutual trust and confidence and to exercise self-restraint in the conduct of activities with a view to creating a positive climate for the eventual resolution of all contentious issues. The future code of conduct can be concluded if all parties have the political will and determination to make it happen. The arbitration and the code-of-conduct consultations are moving on parallel tracks, and the Philippines is committed to both. The Philippines fully supports the effective role of its partners in ASEAN to pave the way forward.

Finally, may I just say that the decisions handed down by arbitral tribunals are binding, particularly as they relate to interpretations of international agreements and conventions, such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The Arbitral Tribunal's award states that the decision is final and binding on the parties. It provides a sound basis for moving forward towards a new beginning: a rules-based regime in the South China Sea. We fully respect the Tribunal's award as an affirmation of UNCLOS. We believe in the fairness and thoroughness of the arbitral proceedings and its binding character, and in the need for all States parties and all members of the international community to respect this outcome. China's non-acceptance of the ruling will have grave consequences for international law and for UNCLOS in particular. I believe that we would not want that to happen.

Does the Government of China say that there is no international law in accordance with UNCLOS?

The meeting rose at 6.45 p.m.